im just a crosshairs [im just a shot away from you]
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im just a crosshairs [im just a shot away from you]

by kenmascrossing

Summary

"Give. Him. Back." Each word was a command and a promise of retribution should he not be obeyed to whatever being had torn his spade from his side.

Or

What if Alex had a do-over.
[Now with a little help]

Notes

Hahahahaha hey guys hahaha I am posting this at 2 am after I wrote it all in one sitting im hoping that this will be a multi-chapter but updates might be slow cz I've never written a full on fanfic before so pls give me grace.
Also English isn't my first language so sorry for any mistakes.

Title from Take me out by Franz Ferdinand

Hope u enjoy♠

UPDATE: 2025. NOV14

PEEP THE NEW TAGS THIS SHIT HAS SUPERNATURAL SHIT IN IT NOW

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1: Just a shot [then we can die]

Chapter Summary

Your hands aren't shaking your aim isn't off
I'm caught in your crosshairs but it isn't for love

Chapter Notes

Update: nov5 2025
Im having wayyyyyy too much fun with this
First rewrite of the fic and im more then satisfied

Finally adding formatting for yall so get EMERSED

emotions are dailed up to 10000 and im not letting up

also hihihi to any new readers and ~hello~ to all my veteran readers i missed yall [see what happens when you read my fanfics you get an extra greeting at the beginning of all my fics? Chapters? Anyways haven't decided yet. SO DROP A KUDOS FOR AN EXTRA GREETING]

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Forever is honest god is a lie

Give me your promise pray, then I die

Let me connect us let us entwine

Let me distract you from the death and my grime

My soul is just itching for your bloody nails

In front of your fury my anger it pales

Your hands aren't shaking your aim isn't off

I'm caught in your crosshears but it isn't for love

Alex felt the moment Nigel's hands reached around his. An embrace of

sorts, or the closest thing to one they had ever shered. It wasnt like their usual touches. Fists in clothes the blood on knuckles and the terrifying certainty that if one of them was a beat out of time the other would fall.

No.... this was gentle, *reverent*, almost. He could feel those fingers slide around his own and against the cool water slick metal of the shotgun.

"Pray for me." Alex’s breath stuttered at the words. "Pray for yourself," Nigel continued, his lips wrapping around the words like an ivy plant spiderwebbing around a haunted ruin. A whisper, scared, yet....

The barrel sat, a dark contrast right under his right eye—that place where his long lashes would kiss his cheek if he dared to blink. "We are one now."

Everything happened in slow motion yet also far far too fast for Alex to do anything about it. It was the work of two movements. A controlled pull and the softest push to his trigger finger.

It's so interesting the way the body falls after instant death.

A person is conditioned since they are little to catch themselves, to do... something to break your fall and as you grow that instinct grows with you. You start falling less and when you stumble you manage to catch yourself. Even when you do fall there are these small shifts — your subconscious trying to minimize the damage.

This.... this was different.

The shot was deafening. He couldn’t look away.

The fall was just that a fall. Not of a person but that of an inanimate object. No twitch no miniscule movement to attempt to catch himself. Graceless. The force of the blast the only thing giving the motion a direction.

Alex could taste the blood.

Nigel wasn’t —

no...

NO NO NO NO NO NO NO NO

There was a mantra rising in his head:

Wake up! Wake up! Wake up!

This wasn't happening.

Alex didn't feel the agonizing hit as his knees made contact with the ground, he just felt the dirt under his fingernails as he desperately clawed closer to Nigel’s rapidly cooling body.

He could barely see through his increasingly blurry vision.

The rain is *cold*....

Cold.

It's too cold. *He's too cold.*

Nigel. *Nigel.*

Nigel.

He's— *Too cold.*

Closer. *Need to warm him up.*

He was going to throw up.

His hands shook as he dragged the corpse into his lap. One of Nigel's stunning blue eyes remained open; the other was gone along with half of his skull. His fingers moved of their own volition grasping at that empty space trying and failing to keep it— keep him together.

He was up to the wrists in blood. That beautiful intellect was now caught in chunks on his sleeve and under his fingernails.

It wasn't just his hands that shook... Alex was shaking all over, a devastating chill.... one he hadn't felt since the day he found out he was the reason for his mother's death entering his bones that same all consuming pain . He sobbed, half-screaming, bowed over —

Nigel.

Nigel.

Nigel.

Nigel.

God, he couldn't be dead, could he? He was just promising him eternity. He couldn't just—no.

It wasn't possible.

He wanted to yell at him, at his stupid eye—the one that was now unseeingly pointed at the heavens—but he couldn't muster anything more than gut-wrenching whimpers and frantic breaths, his hands scrabbling to grip onto his skin as if he only needed to hold him close enough to keep him from the reaper's blade.

You can't have him

He thought deliriously.

"Fuck you, he's *mine*! You can't have him!" he snarled up at the universe itself.

"Give him back! He belongs to *me*!" He was full-on screaming now, his voice almost as raw as the wounds he was digging into his own palm from clenching it over Nigel's stomach.

"Give him back!" He roared, and the ground vibrated.

Alex had no idea what he was saying, just that he wanted Nigel back

—alive, breathing, calling him "*Jack*" in that voice that made him want to claw his ears out and simultaneously beg Nigel to sing for him.

And to think he had been too consumed by fear and the paralyzing shame that he was just as fucked up as Nigel was that he so vehemently refused to accept the title.

Funny how a single moment can change your entire understanding of yourself.

The moment that bullet left the chamber, Alex knew with a bone deep certainty that this was it for him. In that breath, all the passions he had ever experienced in his 17 years of life had narrowed, sharpened, and focused on Nigel Colbie, becoming an obsession never seen before. And just 32 milliseconds later, his world had shattered and splattered on the ground in bloody rivulets, slowly being washed away by the torrential downpour.

Nothing had a point anymore and if it wasn't for the desperate need to keep whatever remained of his spade close Alex would have already turned that gun on himself.

And he would... just after a moment.... he just needed to hold him for a second more..... then— then he would join him...

So he screamed. The sound that left him wasn't human - it was a beast on the verge of a berserker sort of rage.

"**Give. Him. Back.**" Each word was a command and a promise of retribution should he not be obeyed. The ground shook as if to warn the approach of yet another passing train. But no train was coming. Instead, a lightning struck in the distance, the clap of thunder

followed, and on it it carried a voice that only Alex could hear through his sobs.

"*Don't waste this gift a second time*," it seemed to say, and with another boom from the sky, Alex's eyes shot open in his dorm room.

Chapter End Notes

Awiii poor baby alex is just a lil suicidal. But kind of understandable if i fumbled so hard i would be too.

Plsplspls tell me wat you think about the formatting. Is it too much? Is it not enough?

This ch is a lil excessive cz i wanted to convey Alex going coo coo

PLSSSSS DROP A COMMENT IT MAKES MY DAY

Chapter 2: don't move [time is slow]

Chapter Summary

Yet I am here and I am possessed
By your searching glances by the way you're dressed

Chapter Notes

So yeah second chapter in just as many days
Slight Tw for this one brief graphic description of gore
I have a vague idea as to where im going with the plot

there might be some Nigel POV next ch but no promises

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A brief obsession a timeless look
I graze your feathers my breath you took
It's in my crosshairs it's my intent
It's just avoidance for the same event
Yet I am here and I am possessed
By your searching glances by the way you're dressed

Two things hit Alex at once: the disorienting vertigo of the sudden change in scenery, and unspeakable panic pounding behind his eyes. The world reassembled itself in jagged pieces—no train tracks, no blood, just sterile morning light stabbing through dormitory curtains. Where was Nigel? He shot up in bed, looking around as if he'd find muddy footprints on the ground. He would have never left him at the train track—yet he still had to check whether he had dragged himself home delirious the previous night.

He knew he wouldn't find anything there, though. There was no drying rain on his skin, no blood under his nails—just like how there was no second bed in the room. That was strange... The last time his room only had one bed was the day Nigel moved in, but that was months ago. Yet the situation was off-putting enough that it stifled his panic for the time being.

He slowly got up, surveying his surroundings. The half-finished apple on his desk—that he didn't remember eating. Or wait, no—he did... He did remember. He had thrown it on the desk after coming to his

room because he was too lazy to move the few steps it took to throw it in the trashcan next to his desk. And then the next day in its place was a pile of books on human and animal anatomy alike with a neat NC written under the title of each one.

The memory made his head hurt. And to add insult to injury, the alarm clock on his bedside began ringing, displaying 6:30. He had 30 minutes to get ready for breakfast, and he needed to get dressed. He moved on autopilot. The whole thing was so strange but it was better to follow his ingrained routine than to wallow in the grief that was threatening to consume him if he lingered on it for too long.

Was it a dream? No—it had been too real. He could still feel Nigel's damp skin, could still taste his own tears, and feel the phantom burn in his throat from screaming. The splatter of brain matter, hair, and the chunks of bone and skin hanging in contrast over the right side of Nigel's porcelain face would be branded on the back of his eyelids until he died—he was certain of it.

He drifted in and out of a dissociative state as he let muscle memory guide him through his room and to the wardrobe. The dress shirt went on first, then the pants, then the socks, and finally the tie and jacket. He was in a trance, his mind in a jumbled mess. His confusion mounted as he walked outside his room, then out the stairs on the opposite side of the hallway—down, down, down. He had to clear his head, so he took the long way to breakfast, just how he had the day Nigel had moved in. Something compelled him to retrace his steps from that day as if he was following a map.

He rounded the final corner to see Josh and Raj waiting for him at the entrance of the dining hall, as they usually did—or at least they did before Josh died. And now there he was, very much alive, with a shit-eating grin.

"You look horrible. What, did thoughts of a certain girl keep you up all night?" He nudged him with an elbow as Alex moved to walk between them.

"Leave him be, Josh. It's not like you look any better," Raj said in Alex's defense.

It took him a second to realize who Josh was talking about, but then a sudden feeling of déjà vu tore a response from his mouth: "Not like it's any of your business, but I haven't seen Susan in a couple days."

Oh. Susan. Was she also alive? What was happening? He was starting

to freak out again, the panic from 30 minutes ago coming back with a vengeance. She couldn't be alive—she was supposed to be an offering, one of the courting gifts that Nigel had laid at his feet. He hadn't had the guts to accept it of course. He was so stupid. He had pushed him away like something to be discarded, had even looked at him in disgust instead of thanking him and praying for absolution only granted by those bloody artist's hands.

They had grabbed their food and were almost sat at their usual spot, the two boys beside Alex making lively yet quiet conversation, when a sudden thought made Alex's whole body screech to a halt. Had he made Nigel up? No, that wasn't possible. He was too perfect, too holy—he was such a creature of contradictions that Alex's brain could not begin to sculpt him into existence, even though Nigel had lived inside it like an addictive parasite since they had met.

Yet he seemed to be back to a time when all the people who had been affected by his spade were alive and well. He suddenly lost all appetite. The image of Nigel on his knees, a barrel pointed at his face and righteous fire burning behind his pupils, flickered through his head and he choked on nothing.

"Man, you're turning green. Did the cook put something nasty in your porridge?" The concerned voice of Raj drifted over the air and barely registered.

"Huh? No, what? I'm fine."

He wasn't. His brain was working into overdrive. Everything around him seemed way too familiar.

Plates down, they stood up for prayer before breakfast. He didn't recite along with his peers—no. He had nothing to pray for anymore, not when his god was dead by his own hand.

Our Father who art in hell
Nigel's name be sung
Thy kingdom scorched
Thy will—

He mouthed the words in opposition to the false god who had thought it fit to part them. If he only could do it all again he would—

"Amen."

The hall rang out, then a chorus of chairs scraping as everybody sat

down. Alex zoned out, food forgotten as he replayed Nigel's soft cadence, the way he used to call his name: "Jack... Oh, Jack."

"Alex! Who's the new guy?"

Alex's head shot up, his eyes immediately zeroing in on the other side of the room. There. That carefully combed hair. Those slender hands. And Lord above, those stunning eyes flickering around the room before locking onto him with such single-minded focus that he was breathless.

Not the shattered angel from the tracks—no.
Nigel. His Nigel was there.

So he wasn't going crazy. At least no more than he already was—the clues, the familiar feeling, everything. "Don't waste this gift a second time." So he hadn't imagined that. He was back to the day that changed his life.

He knew the script to this conversation. He was supposed to respond with a nonchalant *"I don't know,"* but this time he did know. He knew so much. So he let the silence hang as he stared at those icy eyes.

"Shame you'll have to share your room," Josh continued, as per the vague memory that Alex had of this interaction.

"Sorry?" He tore his gaze away, and the loss felt almost physical.

Misunderstanding the excitement in his voice for anger, Josh continued, "I saw them put an extra bed in your room before."

Alex couldn't wait a second longer. He had to go make sure.

"Sir? Sir?" He rose to his feet, getting the attention of the teacher's table. "Sir, can I have permission to leave, please?"

He didn't even see the face of whoever had responded. "Where do you need to go, Mr. Forbes?"

"To the bathroom," he blurted out, keeping his desperation under control.

"Can't it wait, boy?"

He forced a faux casualness. "It's hard to say, sir. It's quite urgent business."

The dismissive wave felt like he could finally breathe again. He walked out calmly. The moment he was out of sight of the dining students, his measured stride turned into a full-out sprint as he booked it to his room.

Chapter End Notes

Alex:*gaping at Nigel from across the room*
Nigel: who's that little freak (intrigued and affectionate)

So yeahhhh if you are enjoy this so far pls pls leave kudos and a comment the joy I experience from that makes me wanna write more

Chapter 3: come [and get some]

Chapter Summary

> Between us air never stills
> It's filled with chirps and longing shrills

Chapter Notes

> 3 ch sb put me out of my misery
> Anyway a lil warning for animal death and new tags this is a feel like the last kind of normal ch and after that the boys just go insane
>
> Also idk what im doing i don't have an outline so im letting those freaks tap dance on my brain im sorry if the paceing is a lil off
> Ch title from hozier eat your young

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Between us air never stills
It's filled with chirps and longing shrills
I'm just so helpless when you pin me up
When your fingers trace me like the holy cup
I must stop the death invited
God help those who are keeping us divided

Alex didn't bother slowing his pace when he reached his room. Fumbling fingers gripped the doorjamb to swing him inside as he flung the door open. He froze at the threshold, running a mental checklist:

Books ✔
Clothes on the bed ✔
A second pair of slippers next to his ✔
And... that fucking chest at the side of the bed—the one filled with Nigel's creepy fucking pets. ✔

Alex let out an involuntary sob of relief, then slammed his hand over his mouth to muffle a second one. He sat on his bed in case his legs gave out, a few silent tears running down his face. The pure joy in his veins was intoxicating; he let himself get overcome with all the stupid emotions running through his head. Reaching up, he wiped at his cheeks. He had to compose himself—he only had a couple minutes before Nigel walked in, if memory served him right. He had to make a

plan.

Last time, his rejection had driven Nigel to pull the trigger. Never again—he wouldn't let it. Though uncertain how to proceed, he knew their first meeting was crucial. So when Nigel walked in, he found him going through his stuff, just like he had the first time or close enough.

"Do you mind?"

———

Nigel had been left in a mild state of surprise when the boy he'd been making eye contact with stood up and asked to leave for the bathroom.

"Where do you need to go, Mr. Forbes?"

Forbes? Alex Forbes? Was this the person he was meant to share a space with from now on? How... interesting ...

A few minutes ago, when Nigel had felt that gaze burning the side of his head, he had looked up, already mildly annoyed at whoever was gawking at him. Instead of the thinly veiled disgust and laughter he was expecting, he met eyes filled with something close to awe. His first thought was that there was somebody behind him and the other boy had focused on them, but after a brief look around, he determined that that devotion was meant for him—despite his disbelief. So when the boy— Alex —had made his hasty retreat, Nigel had only lingered a few minutes before making a similar request for the bathroom and making his way to his new room. Something told him that he would find Alex there.

And that something was correct.

"Do you mind?"

The scene was peculiar: Alex perched on the extra bed, finishing that nasty apple Nigel hadn't dared touch that morning while reading—Christ that little shit —his private dissection notes. In three strides, Nigel crossed the room and tore the pages from juice-sticky fingers. He was mad yet he kept his face composed. How dare this guy. Yet his eyes didn't stray far from those lips. He had a pice of fruit stuck to the corner of his mouth, he noted absentmindedly.

"How did you find these?" he snarled in a low tone. The bastard just smiled at him and licked his fingers as he got up, forcing Nigel to take

a step back if he didn't want them to collide the proximity was sourt of dizzing. He had to look up very slightly, which stoked his anger.
"Sorry," Alex's grin widened with his half-hearted apology. The tamber of his voice made a tingle run up his spine.
Without another word, he brushed past him, leaving Nigel dumbfounded and still furious a lightflush climbing up the back of his neck. What was with that guy? The way he acted was so contrary to that initial admiration he had felt in the cafeteria. How very interesting.

He had to go. Maybe the library. Anywhere but here where he could still hear the ghost of Alex's breaths. He stormed out in the opposite direction from wherever that guy was going decidedly not thinking about how familiar his presence felt.

———

Alex's heart hammered against his ribs like a caged bird as he strode down the corridor.
This was going to be harder than he had previously thought.

That was supposed to be his first move to capture Nigel's attention. He had grabbed the notes from between the pages of a leather-bound embalming manual. He knew that touching his work was the best way to garner Nigel's wrath, but he wasn't willing to touch that cursed case of taxidermied beasts if it wasn't strictly necessary, so he had to make do. He had grabbed the apple out of panic as he heard the footsteps in the hallway. He couldn't blurt out anything stupid if he was chewing.

Then Nigel walked in, and Alex's mind went so incredibly blank that it had taken the paper being ripped out of his hands for him to wake up.

He was so fucked, and Nigel had been so beautiful attempting to keep a straight face, but Alex could see the outrage behind those soft features. So he had fumbled out of the conversation as best as he was able to. He couldn't remember what he had said; he could only remember the step back that Nigel took. That wasn't right—he would have to remedy that. Nigel should never flinch from him.

He snapped himself out of the memory as he turned toward the courtyard.

Too close. He'd miscalculated. That flicker of rage in those ice-chip eyes had nearly undone him. He'd wanted to lick it away, to press his mouth to those trembling hands that clutched the work Alex had stolen and whisper: I know how your bones fit together now. I've

worn them under my skin. He had almost confessed his plight, but there was time. He had far too much at stake to let such a small mistake as their proximity make him stumble again. Thankfully, he'd walked away, feeling those winter-blue eyes bore into his spine. Again. This time, though, the dance would be different. He'd let Nigel think he led, until he could pull him close and switch their roles, until the moment came to take up his rightful spot at his spade's side.

The sun hit his face as he stepped out into the morning light, and with it came a thought.

That first night, Alex had returned to find Nigel dissecting a pigeon. He hadn't known where it had come from. As a matter of fact, he had been quite scared of his roommate acquiring and possibly killing a living creature just for what at the moment seemed like a passing whimsy.
He wasn't scared now, though, and he could do better than a pigeon. His Nigel deserved better than a pigeon. He needed something to challenge his beautiful intellect.
And Alex would be damned if he couldn't provide it. He made a sharp turn off the beaten path that led to the chapel and made his way into the forest surrounding the school.

Having your father as the principal of the institution you attend has its privileges. He had grown up on these grounds. He knew the forest like the back of his hand, and he knew that it was currently the ravens' mating season—just as well as he knew their favorite spots to nest. He hid his excitement now. All he needed was to find a specimen worthy of his spade.

It didn't take him more than fifteen minutes to track down his prey: a beautiful raven with white spots coloring its feathers. Yes, it would have to do.

Thirty more minutes and, he was sneaking back through the hallways to his room, his jacket carefully wrapped around his gift. Thankfully, Nigel wasn't there when he finally opened the door. It wouldn't do for the surprise to be ruined. He carefully opened the window next to their desks and placed his offering in such a way that it would be visible if you sat down to work on the table. Perfect. It occurred to him that he was acting sort of like a cat bringing its owner a kill, but the thought served nothing more than to make him smile briefly. He had done well, and better yet, he still had enough time before his classes started—given that it was a Saturday and he only had theology after lunch.

He was more than happy to leave the next move up to Nigel.
But in the meantime he wasn't just going to wait around.
No... he had a plan.

Chapter End Notes

Nigel: HOW FUCKING DARE YOU YOU FU—
Alex looking at him with a rose tint: mhm whatever you say beautiful

Nigel freaking out internally : *why am I getting hot and bothered about this mf * (loud groan)
Alex: so hear me out what if I killed a bird and brought it to you cz i know that's your special interest
Nigel: WE'VE EXCHANGED 2 SENTENCES

so yeahhhhhhhhh one more ch down [?] left to go pls pls pls if live on comments and kudos

Chapter 4: I'll try to talk refined [for fear that you'll find out im imagining you]

Chapter Summary

it’s mad of me to bask inside your gaze
It’s foolhardy to think I’ll make it though the maze

Chapter Notes

Ch 4 coming with a BANG (the sound of me shooting myself) the boys are getting to know each other and I finally have a vague idea of how it's want this to end and the way that it's looking it might take me like 10-15 ch if I keep going at the pace I have been (more like 20 to 30but who's counting)

I don't think i need to give any tw for this ch so have fun reading

Ch title from talk by hozier

See the end of the chapter for more notes

it’s mad of me to bask inside your gaze
It’s foolhardy to think I’ll make it though the maze
Since you drew me in towards your center
There was no other choice but for me to enter
That voice it told me that you were mine
But it met resistance when I crossed the line

Nigel had spent the whole day in the library since his encounter with Alex. The dean had given him a few days to get used to the new surroundings, so he had time free while the rest of the students scurried left and right from classroom to classroom.

He was blessedly alone. The musty silence clung to Nigel like a second skin as he traced the embossed title of The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades with restless fingers. The words blurred—all he could see was that infuriating boy’s smirk, the way his tongue had darted out to catch apple juice at the corner of his mouth. A shudder ran through him that had nothing to do with the draft creeping through stained-glass windows. What an infuriating man. The words curdled in his thoughts. And still, there was something about him that reminded him vaguely of the Jack in his prophecy. But Alex was no Jack of his ,

he was simply a nuisance, an annoyance, a distraction. Nothing about Alex Forbes should be interesting. Yet here he was, hiding like some fool…

The bell tower chimed five. He slammed the book shut. This was absurd. He was Nigel Colbie, top of his class at St. Edward's before they'd expelled him for the incident with the formaldehyde and the headmaster's cat. His father had covered everything up and shipped him off yet again. His mother—he flinched almost imperceptibly at the thought of her. He was glad to be out of the house, at least, since it meant he had more time until she would call on him again.

He shook his head and spun on his heel , making for the exit of the library. He didn't flee from golden-eyed boys who smelled of sacramental wine and trouble. He would show his teeth, and Alex would flinch away just like everybody did, and the search for his Jack would continue.

His footsteps echoed through empty corridors as he approached their room. It was empty as he entered. Thank you, Lord. He let out a small prayer. He wouldn't have to face Alex while still being so off-kilter.

He was just sitting down at his desk, ready to arrange his tools and create a comfortable setup for his work in the new space, when he spotted it. There, on the windowsill outside, sat a bird. He could only see a wing and a tail. He got up, softly tapping the glass in hopes the bird would move enough for him to see what kind it was. Strangely, it didn't move at all. Even stranger was that it stood still as he tentatively opened the window. Carefully balancing, he peeked his head out to get a better look in the dying daylight.

On the ledge lay a raven. Not just any raven—a leucistic specimen, its obsidian feathers dappled with white like stars against a night sky. And it was very obviously dead. Nigel softly cradled the body, bringing it inside and spreading it out on the desk. The cause of death wasn't immediately obvious; it took him a minute of feeling around its feathers to see that the neck was broken. Not by a slam into a stationary object—no, that would've left a visible mark. No, this was deliberately done. A thrill went up his spine. His fingers itched for his scalpel. This had been a gift from someone, and the only person he could think of was Alex. Yet Another layer of mystery cloaking his roommate. What kind of person does something like this? A small smile crept onto his face before another thought stopped it. He could also have been overanalyzing it. The bird could've just crashed into the glass and shattered its neck, but something about the carefully

pristine feathers gave more weight to his original theory.

Alex had remained unreasonably cheery for the rest of the day. When Josh, after class, had offered to hang out in the basement as usual, he had agreed—not because he particularly wanted to, but simply out of necessity to kill the excess energy before seeing Nigel again.

The three of them were sitting in their usual spots: Alex atop a nearby table , Josh on the desk crafting those fireworks he was so fond of, and Raj a few meters away, nose buried in a book, clearly wishing to be anywhere else.

“What’s he like?” The question sparked recognition in his mind. It was such a curious experience, knowing what someone would do or say before they themselves knew it.
“Interesting.” This second go-around, he decided to be honest.
“He’s got this collection of stuffed animals,” he said, choking back the fondness attempting to bubble out.
“Isn’t he a bit old for that?” Josh was obviously having fun with it.
“ Real animals, you dick.”
“Cool.” He could tell Josh wasn’t even paying attention at that point.
“Well, anyways, it’s been hard to get any dirt on him.” Josh was carefully tipping the loose gunpowder into one of the paper containers set out in front of him. The comment finally drew Raj’s attention.
“I heard some guys at dinner saying he used to be a day boy at St. Edward’s.” Nigel had skipped dinner. Alex had been hoping for another glance, like an addict Itching for another hit, but his drug of choice had failed to make an appearance.
“Really?” he feigned ignorance.
“Yeah,” Raj continued. “But apparently, he had some kind of family issues.”

“So they sent him here?” Josh scoffed, placing a still-twitching roach on top of the remaining ingredients in the repurposed mint tin on the desk. “Oh, that’ll fix him.” His tone irked Alex in a way it hadn’t the first time he’d heard it. Implying that Nigel needed fixing was a direct opposition to the fact that Nigel was, in fact, perfect and flawless in only the way that a deeply flawed person could be.

With a bang , the tin exploded. Alex hadn’t noticed him lighting the match, and he wasn’t laughing along as Josh snickered at Raj’s distress.
“For fuck’s sake, man,” Alex hopped down from his perch, waving his

hand in front of his face to clear the lingering smoke. “Think I’ll head to bed. See you tomorrow.” He walked out to Josh’s snickering and Raj’s wish of goodnight.

As he strode through the quiet hallway, he thought of the potential reactions he could receive from Nigel when he made it back. Would he confront him about the bird? He hoped he wouldn’t. Alex didn’t really have an explanation, and the one that he did have, he was hoping to save for a later date—preferably when Nigel’s death wasn’t a possibility. So, for now, his plan was simply to wait and observe.

He knew his gift had been accepted when the scent of blood and chemicals wafted through the air before he even opened the door.

As he entered, he couldn’t help but admire him for a second.

Nigel stood silhouetted against the window, his hands gloved in blood up to the wrists. The raven lay splayed across his desk like a sacrificial offering, its breast split open to reveal the intricate machinery of muscle and bone beneath. Alex’s breath caught. An angel of death sweeping down to claim another victim. What a sight.

“You left the window open.” It was a statement of fact—not accusatory, just a sentence left in the space between them. Before Alex could respond, that tantalizing voice spoke again: “It was nice to not return to a stuffy room.” He could see Nigel’s hands moving as he took the bird apart meticulously.

What he wouldn’t give for those hands to be digging inside his chest instead. God, Nigel would only need to say the word, and Alex would lay flat and still under his blade.

He understood the statement for what it was. A dismissal as much as gratitude . His spade was smart— incredibly so. He’d most likely figured out where the raven had come from, and he was letting Alex know that.

“Yeah, no problem.” Why did his voice sound so breathy? Alex almost smacked himself.

He wasn’t acknowledged again as he quickly grabbed a change of clothes before escaping to the connecting bathroom—another of the few good perks that came with his dad being who he was.

The moment the latch closed behind him, he let out a breath. That had gone incredibly well. Step one of the plan: invade Nigel’s personal

things and show him you aren’t scared—check. He was doing better than expected.

He got ready for bed as quickly as possible, sliding back into the room in silent, slippered feet. The only light remained the desk lamp, illuminating Nigel’s gloved hands. He didn’t turn—not when Alex slipped under the covers of his bed, and not when he could surely feel his eyes glued to his every move.

Alex fell asleep that night to the soft clank of metal and glass, the scratch of pen on paper, and the smell of blood.

He couldn’t remember a time he’d slept better.

Chapter End Notes

Nigel not looking at Alex bc he has a knife in his hand and he's still a little mad about this morning : such nice weather we have today

Alex: mhm mhm yes yes true agreed correct you're always right

MORE NIGEL POV I love writing that Lil freakazoid heheheh

Comments and kudos feed me plsplspls spare some 🕷🕷🕷🕷🕷

Chapter 5: It's the light [and it's the obstacle that casts it]

Chapter Summary

> Between the lines and hum of verse,
> I feel the shaking of the hearse.

Chapter Notes

> Long time no see hahahahahah
> Pls don't be mad at me im giving u a long ch as a reward for your patience.
>
> This was supposed to be even longer but I split it into 2 chapters
>
> Title from Nina cried power by hozier

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Between the lines and hum of verse,
I feel the shaking of the hearse.
My faith they couldn't wait to bury,
My corpse you couldn't help but carry.
And I am back just like before,
Waiting, knocking at your door.

Sunday mass was calming.
It had been, even at St. Edward's.
The choir, the untrained voices of his peers, made his mind quiet down for a moment. He so enjoyed the quiet—until he felt those familiar eyes locked onto the back of his head.

Fuck him. Nigel slowly turned his head, meeting Alex's gaze from between the heads of the singing boys.

How was it that every time they were in a room together, it was as if his brain had a second occupant? It was unnerving purely out of the fact that he didn't feel uncomfortable by it.

Last night had been a blur. Well, sort of. He remembered it perfectly, yet he also didn't. He hadn't counted how many stitches he'd placed down the sternum, hadn't noticed how many vertebrae had to be reconstructed from the snapped neck. Fuck, he hadn't even been

paying attention to the stupid bird; he'd been too busy thinking of what would happen if he decided to abandon his project and climb onto Alex's chest. How it would feel to place that same scalpel he'd used on the raven beneath his chin and drag it down, exposing those surely beautiful vocal chords, the larynx, then down the collarbones and the pectorals, down, down across the abdomen, letting the cool air meet flesh that was never meant to be seen. He shivered at the thought of it. Alex would stay still; he was sure of it. He just knew it, like he knew his own name.

"Be seated."

The headmaster's voice rang out as the hymn ended. "It's come to my attention that some boys—" The authoritative voice froze, and so did the whole student body. "Do you two have something important to contribute? Hmm? Campbell? Forbes?" Nigel didn't spin to look at them, but half of the boys surrounding him did.

"Stand up and share with us whatever it is that obviously can't wait until after this assembly." The sound of the two getting up was followed by a quick reprimand. "Campbell, do your tie up properly." A heavy pause. "Well? Campbell?"
"Nothing, sir." The response was quick. "Forbes?"
"Oh, nothing important, I suppose." There was that voice. Nigel twisted unconsciously, like an animal pricking up its ears.
"Both of you, outside my office after assembly. Be seated." A few hisses of sympathy rang out before the assembly continued. "Now, it's come to my attention that some of the boys in year 12 drama will be performing the Tennyson play Becket this term, and they're looking for volunteers for props and stage building."

First day of classes went as he had expected. Most teachers ignored him; the ones who called on him for any reason had low expectations that he easily surpassed.

Alex and Josh's places had remained empty for the first half of the day. When they had finally appeared, each took up their spot, setting up in a manner that was clearly familiar. Alex sat almost arrogantly: slouching, legs spread wide, and a pen perpetually in his mouth. He was obscene. Nigel couldn't look away, and Alex was paying absolutely no mind to the eyes tracing his form.

The teacher had been droning on about something for the past few minutes when a sudden loud noise drew Nigel out of his ogling. One of the students had jerked sharply in their seat, which had cut off the

teacher's insufferable rant.

“Are you all right, Mr. Simms?”
The boy hurried to straighten up and answer. “Um… I’m fine, sir. I just fell off my chair, sir.”

“Well. Be more careful next time.” The teacher spoke in obvious disbelief. What had happened? Nigel wondered, but quickly dismissed the thought; it wasn’t important as the class continued.

“Some of you are working on Becket. Who can tell me about its subject… Thomas à Becket? Yes, Mr. Weyland?”
Weyland eagerly got to his feet, response sure. “Thomas à Becket was the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury in the early 12th century, sir. In 1170, he was murdered in front of the high altar of his cathedral.”

“Exactly.” God, that voice was so annoying. “He knew that the knights were coming to slay him, but he chose to wait for them in the sight of God. His murder was a sacrilegious act of gross profanity.” Nigel noticed Alex’s hand twitching as if he was restraining himself before raising it and waiting to be called on. It took a minute for the teacher to notice, too engrossed in his speech. “However, almost immediately after his death, there were whispers of miracles being performed at his grave. Believers from all over the country traveled day and night on foot in ord… Yes… Mr. Forbes?”

“His murder was simply political. Becket got in the way, so the Church had him put down.” The confidence in the statement made something in Nigel shift. Yet the man at the front of the class was attempting to put Alex down. “Trust Mr. Forbes to come up with such an interesting slant on history.”

Alex wasn’t having any of it, slowly getting to his feet. “Well, you can’t change history. Now, if you look at it, you’ll see it’s exactly like all the other atrocities committed against the people by the Church.” Nigel’s full attention was on him now—not that it hadn’t been before—but now Alex had him clinging on, waiting to see how this interaction would unfold.

“Oh, and exactly what atrocities are you referring to?” The teacher was getting offended.

“The Cathars.” Alex stated, expecting the disgust soon to come. “The Cathars? They were a bunch of heathens who created their own rules to suit themselves. The Church was simply trying to retain order in a very volatile land.”

“All right, what about the Knights Templars, then?” Nigel’s breath hitched.

“I fail to see how this has got anything to do with what we’re talking about.”

“Weren’t they the knights that killed Thomas à Becket?”

“This is ludicrous!” But it wasn’t; Alex had only been picking up speed as the argument continued. “Sir, is it? Sir, weren’t the Templars known as the Knights of Christ? Weren’t they the Church’s foot soldiers?”

“What?—” Alex bulldozed right over him. “So why kill the Archbishop? At least they had the foresight to see the pointlessness of the Holy Crusades. Now, why don’t you tell the class how the Knights of Christ turned their back on the Vatican and adopted the Cathars’ beliefs?”

“This better stop now.” The enjoyment was obvious in those eyes that he couldn’t get out of his head. “Free from the Church, the Templars took control. They had more fingers in the pie than the Vatican, …..which is a lot of fingers.” Nigel choked back a laugh, but the teacher didn’t seem to share the class’s amusement.

“Sit down.” He spat, face red and blotchy.

“Isn’t that why they were hunted down and burned at the stake?”

“They had betrayed their original cause.” It was a last ditch effort that was quickly squashed by Alex’s final blow. “And whose cause was that?”

"Get out of my class. Go on. Get out."

When the class ended, he was so eager to follow Alex and maybe pick his brain about more of his ideas that he left his books at the desk.

——

Alex hadn't been able to help picking the same fight with Reverend Donaldson. Maybe it was the blatant historical erasure, or it could have been Nigel's eyes on him. So instead of doing something new and impulsive, he'd picked the lesser evil, and so an argument it was.

The bell for end of class rang a few minutes after he had stormed out. It gave him a reality check; in his blind annoyance, he hadn’t gotten

his stuff, like last time. He spun on his heel, heading back.

He was just turning the corner when somebody, clearly in a hurry, collided with him. In an attempt to catch himself and whoever had stumbled into him, Alex threw out one hand to steady the person as he pivoted, their momentum driving him into the opposite wall. As they finally steadied, the situation left Alex more or less pinned against the wall; hands were on his shoulders, and his were on a waist, and there were two brilliant ice blue eyes in front of his.

Shit.

Nigel was panting a little. Maybe out of the fright of the whole situation, or maybe like he had run all the way here. His soft lips were slightly open and red, as if he'd been biting them. He was just so slightly disheveled that Alex could so easily mistake the look on his face for a look he'd wear after being kissed.

Shit, shit, shit, and damn it all to hell.

His hands squeezed involuntarily, and Nigel gasped as if surfacing from cold water. He pushed himself away.

The shove was a violence that sang through Alex’s bones, a brutal poetry that left his back smarting against the cold stone. He didn’t push back. He absorbed it, a willing martyr to Nigel’s turbulence. He just watched, breath caught in his throat, as Nigel stumbled back, putting precious, trembling distance between them.

Nigel looked… off. His usually impeccable composure was in tatters. His chest heaved, his eyes were wide with something far beyond anger—it was pure, undiluted panic. He looked at Alex not like a nuisance, but like a phantom, an omen he couldn’t decipher.

A tense silence stretched between them, thick and electric. Nigel’s chest rose and fell with sharp, shallow breaths, his eyes wide with a storm of confusion, anger, and something else Alex couldn't quite name—something that looked terrifyingly like recognition.

Alex slowly righted himself, his own heart hammering against his ribs. He could still feel the imprint of Nigel’s slender frame, the warmth of him through the crisp cotton shirt. He didn’t speak, couldn’t speak, afraid that any word would shatter the fragile, charged moment and send Nigel fleeing for good.

It was Nigel who broke the silence, his voice a low, strained thing that

was nothing like his usual drawl.

“I…” Nigel started, then stopped, his jaw clenching. He seemed to gather himself, the ice returning to his eyes as he finally met Alex’s gaze. The vulnerability was sealed away behind a familiar, cool mask. “Your performance in there was… moderately less idiotic than the rest of this institution’s curriculum.”

Alex’s smile widened into a full grin. There he is. “High praise, Colbie. I’ll take it.”

He took another step, closing the distance between them again, though not as close as before. This time, Nigel held his ground, though Alex saw the subtle tremor in his hands before he clenched them into fists at his sides.

“The Cathars,” Alex said, picking up the thread Nigel had so clearly wanted to pull. “You think I was wrong?”

A spark ignited in Nigel’s blue depths. The academic debate was safe ground, familiar territory. “Simplistic,” Nigel countered, his voice regaining some of its sharpness. “Reducing their annihilation to mere politics ignores the… aesthetic purity of the Church’s terror. It wasn’t just a power struggle; it was a sacrament of violence. A cleansing.”

The way he said it, with such reverent horror, made the air leave Alex’s lungs. This was it. This was the connection.

“A sacrament,” Alex repeated, the word a prayer on his lips. He leaned in slightly, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper. “Like an offering.”

Nigel’s breath hitched. His eyes searched Alex’s face, looking for mockery, finding only intense, unwavering sincerity.

A call of Alex's name rang out, a jarring intrusion that made them both flinch. The spell was broken, but the connection was made. The moment of isolated intensity was over.

In the few seconds it took Alex to look up to see who had interrupted them, Nigel turned and disappeared.

He slumped back against the wall, the ghost of a touch on his hands and the echo of a body missing from his view.

"Forbes, you forgot this!" The yell brought him back to life as Josh and

Raj came from around the corner, Josh waving Alex's forgotten textbooks. When they finally got close enough, he made to snatch them from the other boy's fingers, but Josh pulled back. "Nuh uh, I've gotta show you something first." "Let's at least go to our room first," Raj interjected.

Alex followed, probably because he was still replaying the past few minutes in his head.

Once inside, Josh handed back Alex's belongings, keeping one notebook to himself. "Look at what the little freak left behind," he giggled, waving it around like a prize. Alex's blood ran cold. But before he could stop him, the book was already opening, and those familiar words were coming out of someone else's mouth. "He's been studying us like we're part of his bug collection. Look what it says about you. 'Alex is—'" He finally got enough function in his body to snatch the paper. "Okay, this little sh t needs to be taught a lesson." Josh continued, nonplussed. "The guy's a freak, Alex. Let's put the book back before he finds out it's gone." Raj, the voice of reason. But Alex's eyes were glued to the pages. That neat script had changed from what it had been the previous time. The "Alex is an egocentric megalomaniac with delusions of grandeur" was replaced with: Alex is divine intervention cast down on me to test my patience.

"What do you propose we do, mein Führer?" The Nazi salute almost hit him in the face. "Will you give it a fucking rest, please?" He snapped.

"Sorry," Josh quickly dropped his hand.

"What we'll do is I'm gonna go put this back, and you'll forget that you read it," he said. Raj sighed in relief.

"Come on, just scare him a little—" "No." His voice was final. "You leave him be." Alex almost left the room before he heard Josh’s resignation. "Fine, fine. Let's at least go blow off some steam. Let's meet on the train; I have some new toys I'd like to try out." The agreement felt a little too forced, but Alex was all too happy to ignore it if only to get Josh away from Nigel as soon as possible. "Alright"

So he left the room, and when he got back to his own, thankfully empty one, he didn't have the heart to give back the notebook. Instead, he stashed it in his desk drawer, in the midst of his own books. He hoped Nigel would forgive him, but he had to know what was happening in his spade's beautiful head.

Chapter End Notes

Nigel having a crisis: FUCK YOU AND YOUR PRETTY BOY FACE
Alex gets a little too into verbally destroying his teacher.
Nigel: OH NOOOOO YOU'RE ALSO SMART FUCKKKKK

Sorry if the convo at the end felt off im trying to setup the train scene but
NEXT CH IS BOUT TO BE JUICY HEHEHEHEHEHE

plsplspls comment and lmk what you might like to see in future ch

Chapter 6: don't you ever [tame your demons]

Chapter Summary

> Is it honest then to say you mourned,
> When it was your love who he had scorned?

Chapter Notes

> Wowoowowow 2500 words ?!?!?! Me posting twice in one day YALL BETTER BE GRATEFUL 🍒
>
> okok guys we need some ge graphic descriptions of violence come in here along with the minor character death but if uve gotten this far I genuinely don't think you gaf
>
> Oki tite is from Arsonists lullaby by hozier
>
> HAVE FUN READING

See the end of the chapter for more notes

What's a person when you are no longer him?
What's a partner when the road keeps getting dim?
When the red has swallowed up your vision,
And the actions weren't your decision,
Is it honest then to say you mourned,
When it was your love who he had scorned?

The train was cold. The rickety old thing had no heating, and Alex was painfully used to it. It felt strange to come here alone. A unlit smoke sat between his lips Raj had flat out refused to come, and Josh had been adamant that he wanted to go early to "set up," as he'd said, and Alex hadn't paid him any heed. They'd agreed to meet in the very first car when the train started, and Alex was currently waiting for just that to happen.

As the first shake of the night rocked through the vehicle, Josh slammed the little dividing door open, a mad grin on his face. "Come on, man, I wanna show you something."

Alex rolled his eyes but dutifully stood and followed Josh through the cars. "Oh, you're gonna like this," the chatter was familiar, so he

mildly zoned out; he was thinking of Nigel, as per usual. So when Josh suddenly froze in the entrance to the last door, he almost ran into him. "Why did you stop?" his confusion was palpable.

Josh's voice was just barely loud enough for him to hear over the rushing of wind around them as he turned to face him. "You gotta be real quiet," he whispered conspiratorially, and before Alex could question what the fuck he was talking about, Josh flung the door open and strode in.

Alex's brain froze. He could hear the blood pumping through his veins.

The soft, sleeping face of Nigel was the only thing he could focus on.

"What the fuck." His first words were a mumble.

"Surprise," Josh grinned. "I thought you were just too scared to do it yourself 'cuz of your dad, you know—" His hand flew up, connecting squarely with Josh's nose.

———

Josh was an impulsive bastard.

Something about the way Alex had so quickly jumped to the weirdo's defense had scratched him the wrong way, so in the split second when his best friend had snapped at him, a plan had already formed in his head.

He'd waited.

He knew Alex would be out; he always was when they had plans for the train. He needed to buy cigarettes, the fucker. So he could count on the freak being alone.

Raj wanted no part in this. Sucker.

He'd been in Alex's room more times than he could count; he knew every squeaky floorboard by heart, so sneaking in was the easy part. Cloth over the mouth and nose of the sleeping figure and a few seconds of thrashing. It felt good, like one of his bug experiments but better. So much better.

Dragging the sleeping body to the train by himself was a hassle he wouldn't soon want to repeat, but what had to be done was done.

He'd set him up in the very back corner without him stirring once.

He was sure Alex would love this.

—

Nigel came to to the words "How fucking dare you" being screamed and a body being thrown against a hard surface. He could feel shaking all around him. Was he moving? In a train, perhaps. He cracked his eyes open, and through the artificial dizziness, he saw quite the sight.

Alex, one fist curled into his friend—what was his name again, ah, yeah, Josh—Josh's collar, and free hand dripping in blood, supposedly from the other boy's currently profusely bleeding nose. What he was speaking, though, caught him way more off guard.

Josh's voice was a wet, gurgling thing, choked by blood and fear. "I did it for you! He's a freak, Alex! He's watching you, writing about you! I thought you would be grateful!"

Alex's face was a mask of cold, terrifying fury. The playful arrogance was gone, replaced by something primal and absolute. He slammed Josh against the rattling and still open door of the train car before pushing him through into the open space before the next car.

"You do not," he snarled, his voice low and venomous, "get to make decisions for me. You do not get to touch what is mine ." The word hung in the air, heavier than the roar of the tracks. Mine. It wasn't a claim of friendship or possession. It was a statement of fact, a boundary drawn in blood.

A second punch landed as Nigel got up on unsteady feet, gripping the backs of the seats to steady himself. "You do not get to look at him, and I'll be damned if you get to breathe the same air as him," another punch and a wet squelch as it connected.

Nigel moved closer, supporting himself on whatever he could. He watched Alex systematically pummel the living shit out of who Nigel had thought was his best friend.
He stumbled as the train jerked, falling gracelessly into a nearby seat. The sound gave Alex pause. His fist, curled and wound up for another strike—

His head snapped toward him. The rage in his eyes didn't soften, but it shifted, refocusing with an intensity that was equally terrifying. He released Josh, letting him slump to the floor, a mess of blood and tears. Alex took a step toward Nigel, then another, his boots echoing on the ground.

He didn’t ask if Nigel was okay. The question would have been an insult. Instead, he knelt, his eyes scanning Nigel’s form for injury, his hands hovering just inches away, as if afraid his touch would break him. Deep scratches and a few quickly forming bruises from Josh fighting back littered his face as he looked up at him.

“Did he hurt you?” The question was a demand, stripped of all pretense.

Nigel’s mind was eerily quiet. He was a specimen under a microscope, and Alex was the only other person in the world who understood the lens. He slowly sat up, ignoring the pounding in his head from the chloroform—or whatever crude agent Josh had used. His eyes never left Alex’s.

"He didn't," Nigel had been half tempted to lie just to see the way Alex would have surely gotten up and killed Josh with his bare hands. The same man that was now groaning on the floor, whimpering.

It was a pathetic, insectile sound. It grated against the sacred silence that had fallen between them. "You picked the fucking freak you've known for two days over me," the question was half choked.

Josh had just signed his obituary. Nigel could tell by the slight stiffening of Alex's shoulders. Seemed like Nigel would get his wish after all.

Alex’s eyes, still burning with a feral light, flickered toward the noise with pure contempt. The decision was made in an instant.

Without a word, Alex stood. He moved not with rage, but with a chilling, efficient purpose. He grabbed Josh by the collar of his jacket, hauling the semi-conscious boy upright with a grunt of effort.

“Wha… Alex… please…” Josh slurred, blood bubbling on his lips.

Alex didn’t answer. He dragged him to the connecting door between the cars. The wind screamed through the gap. With a final, tremendous heave, he shoved Josh towards that gap.

"Help, please, I'm sorry..." the begging crescendoed to full-out screams of terror as Alex gave one last decisive push to the middle of Josh’s chest. He fell back, barely holding on to the handrail on the outside of the train.

Alex didn't even flinch as Josh was swept away by a passing pole.

He calmly walked back toward Nigel, then slammed the heavy door shut, cutting off the sound of the wind and sealing them in a private, rattling world of their own.

The lock clicked into place with a sound of finality.

Silence.

The only sounds were the rhythmic clatter of the tracks and their own ragged breathing. Alex turned back to Nigel, his chest rising and falling. The fury had receded, replaced by something more intense, more focused. His mission was completed.

He walked back and stood over Nigel, not as a threat, but as a monolith. A guardian. His knuckles were split and smeared with Josh's blood.

Nigel looked up at Alex; he was so immensely perplexed by him. The raven, the sacrilege in the history class—it all came down to this moment, this man drenched in violence on his behalf.

Slowly, deliberately, Nigel reached out. His fingers, usually so steady and precise, trembled only slightly. He took one of Alex's wounded hands in his own. He turned it over, examining the damage with a clinical eye that felt like a caress.

"You've made a mess of your metacarpals," his voice low and husky. It was the most intimate thing he could have said. And it was true; each knuckle was mangled, blood dripping and soaking into his shirt.

A slow, dangerous smile spread across Alex's face. It wasn't like his arrogant grins in class. This was something darker, more genuine. A shared secret.

"Worth it," Alex murmured, his eyes locked on Nigel's fingers tracing his own.

The train lurched around a curve, and Nigel's grip tightened instinctively. Alex didn't pull away. He shifted to sit across from Nigel, his hand left in Nigel's own. His fingers were gentle as they traced the edges of the torn skin.

"When we get home, you are letting me tend to this," he said simply, passing on information as if it was a done deal. "And to your face, too."

Alex let out a choked laugh. "Yeah, whatever you want," he sighed.

They remained silent for the rest of the ride, Nigel softly cradling one of Alex's hands while Alex sat leaning forward, his head resting on his other, just as injured, hand.
As the train circled back to the first stop, the one they had originally boarded, they stood. Nigel swayed a little; seems like the chemicals hadn't worn off quite as thorough as he'd thought. Alex steadied him immediately, leaving bloody handprints over his sleeping clothes.

No words were exchanged as they got off the train or as they walked back to the dormitories.

Nigel had grabbed Alex's wrist about halfway through the walk and hadn't let go since. There was something urging him to stay close, to keep physical contact, something concrete.

They snuck back on soft feet, and as the door to their room clicked shut behind them, Nigel let out a breath of relief.

The only light they turned on was the small desk lamp.
"Sit and take that nasty shirt off," Nigel ordered as he prepared the supplies he'll need.

Alex obeyed, tossing off the top part of his clothes before plopping down onto Nigel’s bed.

Nigel, dragging over the desk chair, setting it up, sat on it. "Come on, give it here," he gestured, and Alex stuck one hand forward. He immediately took it, beginning to wash out the wounds. The only sounds in the room were the soft splashing of the water dripping to the ground and Alex's occasional involuntary, almost silent gasp of pain.

Nigel could feel his eyes on him. On the way he carefully cleaned the blood to reveal the damage underneath. "You're not going to need stitches, at least not on this hand, whi—"

"You're really good at this," Alex mumbled for the first time in what was likely a few hours. Nigel’s head snapped up.

"I'm good at many things that require a steady hand and a complete lack of squeamishness," Nigel replied, his tone flat, factual. Yet a hint of a smile lingered at the corner of his lips.

"I suppose so," Alex whispered. Breaking eye contact, he looked up at

the ceiling, letting Nigel go back to his work.

After the first hand was wrapped in bandages, it was time for the second one.

Alex looked away once more as he presented his right hand. It was in significantly worse shape. The knuckles of the pointer and middle finger were split almost down to the ligament; Nigel could just barely see them flexing along with each twitch of the fingers. He had prepared his suture supplies just in case, and he was now thankful about it.
Carefully, he urged Alex to lean closer, guiding his hand to lay on Nigel's own thigh. He very pointedly did not think of the way that hand immediately gripped his leg, the thumb barely brushing his inner thigh over his pajama trousers.

He got the needle ready, and with a few sure moves, placed two stitches on each knuckle. Alex didn't flinch; his eyes were carefully watching his hand, no.... they were watching the place his hand lay. His thumb moved in slow strokes that almost drove Nigel to distraction as he finished up his work. "Time for your face," he cleared his throat as he got up, letting Alex's touch fall away as he got closer, standing fully between his spread legs. He gripped his chin, tilting his head this way and that to get a better look.

"He did a number on you," he spoke as he began to clean the two deep scratches that trailed from Alex's jaw to his collarbones.

Alex’s eyes finally flicked down to meet his. The fury was long gone, replaced by a deep calm. “He touched you,” Alex said, as if that single fact explained and justified everything—the blood on his hands, the body on the tracks, the new, permanent line drawn in their world. "It wasn't even a question."

Nigel was baffled. "You killed a person for me," the truth of the words finally being spoken out loud was thrilling.

"I did," the agreement was instant.

"You killed your best friend for me," Nigel repeated; he felt like the words weren't getting through to him.

Alex reached up with both hands, resting them on Nigel's hips. "And I'd do it again."

It was Nigel who broke the stalemate. He didn't move away. He leaned

in, his movements slow, deliberate, like a predator finally closing in. His free hand came up to cup the other side of Alex's jaw, holding him still not with force, but with an unspoken command.

Alex didn't breathe. He was a statue, a willing captive.

Then, Nigel's gaze dropped to Alex's mouth.
The intention was as clear as a shout.

The door to the room suddenly flew open with a bang.

Raj stood in the doorway, his face pale and frantic, his chest heaving. "Alex! Thank God! Have you seen Josh? He never came back from the train, and I can't find him any—"

His words died in his throat. His eyes widened, taking in the scene: Alex shirtless on Nigel's bed, Nigel leaning over him, one hand cradling his face, the other resting on his neck, the bloody medical supplies scattered on the desk chair between them.

The spell shattered. The world, with all its noise and consequence, came crashing back in.

Nigel's hand snapped back from Alex's face as if burned. He schooled his features back into their usual mask of icy indifference in a heartbeat, but the air still crackled with what had almost happened.

Alex turned his head slowly, a dangerous, lazy smile spreading across his features, the bruise on his cheek pulling taut. Nigel could see the fury all over his features.

"Josh?" Alex said, his voice deceptively light. "No, Raj. I haven't seen him."
"Right, sorry," Raj mumbled as he quickly scurried out the room.

A few minutes of tense silence passed before a snort and a thump drew Nigel's attention. "Fuck this shit, I'm going to sleep," Alex groaned as he flopped fully onto Nigel's bed. Before Nigel could protest, he was out cold. And Nigel was left with the clean-up.

Chapter End Notes

Aren't we all so glad that Alex didn't overreact.

Nigel watching alex beat a guy half to death then kneel at his feet.: Uuuuuuu this is making me feel stuff

Alex: nahhhhh fuck my bff of like 10 years im not fumbling that bag again

Soooooooooo did you like it?!?!?!?!??!
Idk what possessed me but I can't go to sleep until I post it so here WAT MY CHILDREN im like soooo sleep deprived

ps. Comments and kudos make me wanna write more plspls pls comment

Chapter 7: I'll set you free [from your sanity]

Chapter Summary

> Lost in sensation lost in a rush
> High off sound of your voice in a hush

Chapter Notes

> A lil ch for yall and this one is purely self indulgent. Sry not sry ab blue balling you last ch. (It's not gonna be the last time this shit is a slow burn for a reason)
>
> HOPE YOU HAVE FUN WITH THIS ONE
>
> Title from in your fantasy by ateez

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lost in sensation lost in a rush
High off sound of your voice in a hush
I'd kill for a moment of stillness with you
I'd die for forever reliving it through
It won't be enough it never will be
I need you entangled together with me

Alex was rudely awakened by Nigel's alarm. Why was it so fucking close to him? He groggily cracked his eyes open, looking toward his—no, Nigel's —nightstand because he was in Nigel's bed.

He was apparently lost in thought long enough for the alarm to get annoying for the other occupant in the room.

"Turn that shit off," Nigel groaned, burying his face into the crook of Alex's neck.

Wait. Stop. Pause. What the—

Alex looked down, one hand immediately slapping over the alarm clock to silence it. That left him in quite the situation.

Nigel was, for lack of a better word, sprawled half on top of him: one arm around his bare waist, legs tangled, soft sleepy breaths warming Alex's skin. He could feel his face getting hot. Had they slept together?

A few moments of stillness and confusion later and Nigel let out a groan, pushing himself up, hands planted squarely on Alex's chest. He sat up, effectively straddling him as he rubbed at his eyes.

The morning light cut through the window, catching the dust motes dancing around him like a halo around a particularly beautiful angel — holy. His hair was a mess, his usual icy composure sanded down by sleep. He looked young. Unguarded. Alex was close to prayer in that moment.

He blinked, those brilliant ice-blue eyes focusing slowly, descending from whatever dream he'd been in and landing directly on Alex.

On them .

On the fact that he was sitting in Alex's lap, on his own bed, with the evidence of Alex's savagery wrapped around his hands and smeared faintly on his pajamas.

A sly smile rolled over his stunning features.
"You're on me," Alex managed to get out between his stuttering thoughts. "What an astute observation, incredibly insightful," the grin got somehow wider. Nigel's tone was sleep-rough and downright seductive, a hint of mocking curled around the words. "Why?" The flush traveled from Alex's face down to his chest. "Because you decided to sleep on my bed and I didn't wish to sleep on yours."

Nigel's hand, the one that had still been resting on Alex's chest, stilled. His gaze dropped from Alex's eyes to where his fingers were splayed over his pectorals, then back up to his face.

"Your pulse is high," he stated matter-of-factly.

Alex choked, fighting back the urge to grab those tantalizing hips. Instead, he covered his increasingly reddening face with one arm. "Mhm," he nodded minutely.

Nigel clicked his tongue in disapproval as he slid his hand higher. Alex bared his throat instinctively as Nigel's hand wrapped around it.

Alex's breath stuttered, and he bit his lip almost hard enough to draw blood.

He felt the shift in weight as Nigel moved. Not to get off, but to adjust his position, settling more firmly astride him. The pressure was deliberate, undeniable, and Alex was losing his mind.

Then, fingers—cool, precise—wrapped around his wrist. Nigel's touch was firm, not harsh, but brooking no argument. He pulled Alex's arm away from his face, exposing him completely to the morning light and that unnervingly focused gaze. Both of Alex's hands went to rest on Nigel's thighs with no input from his brain.

"Is it my proximity?" Nigel asked, his voice still that low, considering hum. His eyes lifted back to Alex's, pinning him in place. He leaned forward slightly, his weight shifting, and Alex's hips gave an involuntary, tiny jerk upwards. A helpless, reflexive response as his hands flew up to grip Nigel's waist. A small sound escaped him.

"Why are you—" another helpless sound as Nigel sat back, putting all his weight onto Alex's hips, "—moving so much?"
Nigel's eyes flickered down to where their bodies were connected, then back to Alex's face. A spark of something—understanding, triumph, dark amusement—lit the icy blue depths.

"Oh Alex," Nigel said softly. The words were a verdict.

He knew. He saw it all. Alex was transparent to him.

Before Alex could form a coherent thought, let alone a sentence, the heavy silence was shattered by a sharp, authoritative rap on their door.

"Forbes! Colbie!" It was the housemaster's voice, grim and loud. "Emergency assembly. Be down in ten."

In an instant, Nigel was off him, moving with a fluid, silent efficiency that was jarring. Alex lay there for a second, the ghost of Nigel's weight and that analytical touch seared into his skin. The thrum of panic and desire was now entirely replaced by a cold, sharp frustration.

He swung his legs over the side of the bed, his bandaged hands throbbing in time with his heartbeat. He looked at Nigel, who was getting dressed with unhurried movements, his face lost in thought.

The clarity of the violence on the train was gone, yet there was no regret to be found when he thought about it. It was obvious why they were calling everybody down, but he didn't care. Josh had gotten what he deserved. The only thing that mattered was the boy now buttoning his cuffs with calculating calm.

"An emergency assembly," Alex finally said, his voice rough. He

needed to break the silence, to get those eyes back on himself. “Do you think…”

Nigel finished with his tie, his fingers making a perfect knot without even looking. He turned, those ice-blues sweeping over Alex, taking in his disheveled state, the blush that still hadn’t fully receded, the white-knuckled grip of his bandaged hands on the edge of the mattress.

“They found something,” Nigel stated, his tone flat and certain. It wasn’t a question. “Or someone talked.” His gaze lingered on Alex for a moment longer, analytical. “Your performance will need to be convincing. Grief is a useful mask. As is confusion.”

Alex chuckled, a dry, hollow sound. "What about your performance? Would you be my alibi?" Nigel stepped closer, running a hand through Alex’s hair once. "What do you think?" before turning and walking to the bathroom.

Alex pushed himself to his feet, a sudden, sharp fear cutting through the rest of his emotions. He hadn't been serious.“I don’t need you to get involved,” he bit out, snatching his own rumpled shirt from the floor. The movement sent a jolt of pain through his stitched hand, and he welcomed it.

He received no response for a few minutes, only the sound of running water and Nigel brushing his teeth.
Alex followed him into the bathroom. He couldn't let Nigel put himself in harm's way; that was the whole point of this stupid fucking second chance.
Said man's lips twitched as he spat out the toothpaste, the barest hint of a smile as he got closer. “Don’t you?” He picked up his blazer, shrugging it on. “You wear your tells plainly, Alex. Your breathing, the… physical reactions.” He adjusted his cuffs. “Raj saw enough to be suspicious. The authorities will be looking for far less. I’m already involved.”

He got right in Alex's face. "You beat a guy to death for touching me. Do you think I'll let you handle the consequences alone?"

He was right. The fucking bastard was always right. Alex yanked his shirt on, wincing as the fabric scraped over the scratches on his cheek and chest. He felt raw, inside and out. The adrenaline was gone, leaving a cold, heavy dread in its place. Josh was gone. Erased. But the world had a way of noticing empty spaces.

“What do we say?” Alex asked, the question gritted out between his teeth. He hated needing to ask. Hated that Nigel’s mind, which had just been cataloging his humiliating arousal minutes ago, was now their best defense—but he also loved it. His spade was so unspeakably smart that he wasn't even that worried. He knew Nigel had everything planned the moment they had left the train last night.

“We say we parted ways with him after history class,” Nigel said, his voice low and even. He walked to the door, pausing with his hand on the knob. He looked back at Alex, his gaze sweeping over him one last time, a final, critical assessment. “We went to a cafe. We studied. We went to sleep. We know nothing.”

He opened the door, the corridor light framing him in the doorway.

“And you,” Nigel added, his voice dropping to a near-whisper, “will stop looking like a guilty puppy that pissed on the carpet. You didn’t do anything wrong.” Alex scoffed before lifting one hand, gesturing to the wrappings. "How do we explain this then?"

Nigel smirked. "You defended me from a very scary dog on the way home, of course." His voice got all high and patronizing at the end. "My knight in shining armor."

Then he turned and walked out, leaving Alex standing in the middle of the room, the echo of his words and the memory of his weight the only things holding him together as he prepared to face the inquisition. This was about survival. And they were in it together.

He wouldn't let anything happen to Nigel; that wasn't even a thought that crossed his mind. But there were so many variables that he couldn't predict. The police, the headmaster, Raj’s suspicious eyes—it was a house of cards, and one wrong breath could bring it down.

They had deviated so far from last time that Alex was playing almost as blind as everyone else. And that was another thing. He had to tell Nigel eventually. The secret was a live wire in his chest, sparking every time Nigel looked at him with increseing familiarity. The only thing keeping his mouth shut was that Nigel hadn't called him Jack yet, and Alex was starting to get stir-crazy with the waiting, with the pretending.

But he would wait. He would play his part in this grim pantomime. He would wait as long as it took, through all the lies and the assemblies and the suspicious glances, as long as he got Nigel to claim him back eventually. As long as this ended with them not on those damned

tracks again Alex would thank his lucky stars.

Chapter End Notes

Nigel is evil guys and alex has experienced enough sexual frustration to make him have an aneurism.

Alex crying sobbing throwing up : OH nooooo the consequences of my actions noooooo

—

Nigel every two seconds: I WANT THAT GUY (pointing at alex) AND I TO FUCK CRAZY STYLE BUT IM SCARED HE DOESN'T ACTUALLY WANT ME

Alex pleading: PLS PLS PLS ONE CHANCE PLSSS

Anyway hope you enjoyed hehehehehehhe I live off of coments and kudos

Also also come yell at me on insta ab these mfs @kenmascrossing

Chapter 8: Im your source [of self-destruction]

Chapter Summary

I know how you're conflicted by every honest truth
How you wish to twist around your innocence and youth

Chapter Notes

Sooo

PLS DON'T KILL ME.

im sorry for the little hiatus Im fighting for my life between piano lessons and Italian. BUT IM NOT LEAVING THIS FIC I PROMI.

Ch title from Metallica Master of puppets

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It's honestly amusing, it's never been a lie

The constant mask, you never have been shy

I know how you're conflicted by every honest truth

How you wish to twist around your innocence and youth

It's incredibly alluring the way you speak my name

With some sort of holy power never feeling shame.

The walk down to the mess hall was shorter than it had any right to be. Alex could feel the stress building with every step.

He was being honest when he'd told Nigel that he had no regrets. Josh had deserved his fate and he had been more than happy to carry it out. Truth be told it had all been a blur. The first few seconds hadn't even registered. He'd seen Nigel's frame slumped in the seat and next thing he knew he was turning Josh's face into ground meat. The way

Nigel had looked at him after everything had been intoxicating, that and also his touch…..Fuck. The way his fingers had wrapped around the bloody mess of his hands and had so meticulously cleaned him up, it was like a rush he'd never felt before. He was already yearning for a hit, a brush of skin on skin, something to bring him back to reality, but he'd have to wait.

And this morning.

Alex almost tripped over his own two feet at the thought. Turns out Alex was a stronger man than even he himself had believed. That slender waist under his palms had almost been his undoing but he had resisted, bafflingly so. He could have so easily dragged him down and stolen a sacred kiss from those bitten lips. It would have tasted like sin. Like the garden of Eden. Like temptation given flesh and he would have been helpless in it. He knew that if that had happened he would have ravished Nigel then and there with full disregard of his sanity and better yet his plan. But had it been worth It though? Resisting? When he could have tasted that marble skin and made his angel arch so beautif—

He needed to get that image out of his head before seeing Nigel again. Otherwise he didn't know what he'd do.

Alex had almost reached the double doors of the hall before a hand clamped around his wrist and pulled him back into an empty corridor.

Alex almost threw a punch. Funny how that was becoming an instinctive response. But he froze before deflating as he saw Raj's face, a mess of conflicting emotions—fear, suspicion, and a desperate, pleading confusion. His grip on Alex's wrist was tight, almost painful.

"What the hell man, I almost knocked your teeth in—"

“Alex,” he whispered, his voice strained, cutting him off. “What the hell is going on? Where is Josh? Really.”

Alex’s mind, still half-caught in the tempting fantasy of Nigel’s mouth, snapped back to the grim present. He schooled his features into a mask of weary concern.

“I don’t know, Raj,” he said, his voice deliberately rough. He gently but firmly pried Raj’s fingers from his wrist. “I never went yesterday. I bailed. I was too mad and decided to go grab coffee with Nigel instead since he invited me. Maybe he fell asleep waiting for me. I don’t know and I don’t care that much.”

It was a flimsy lie, and Raj’s eyes narrowed. He knew Josh. Josh was impulsive, but he wasn’t a ghost. He didn’t just vanish after orchestrating a confrontation.

“I saw you,” Raj hissed, lowering his voice even further. “Last night. In your room. With him.” He jerked his head vaguely in the direction of the assembly hall. “You were both… there was blood, Alex. On your hands. On his clothes.”

Alex’s expression didn’t flicker. He leaned in closer, his own voice dropping to a conspiratorial, frustrated whisper. “Yeah, because some fucking stray came at us on the walk back! I got between it and Nigel. It scratched the hell out of me. That’s all you saw. That’s it.” The lie, now fueled by the need to get this over with, came out smoother. “Nigel was just helping me clean up. You barged in at a bad time.” A mild look of disgust flashed across Raj’s face. “ Yeah, bad time for sure. You two were awfully close. ” Alex looked up at him sharply. “What the fuck are you trying to say? “ Raj stepped back, his hands raised in surrender. “Nothing, sorry. B ut still, I don’t believe you,” Raj said, but the conviction in his voice was wavering, replaced by a dawning uncertainty. He didn’t want to believe the alternative.

“I don’t care what you believe,” Alex shot back, the words cold and final. “Josh is gone. I’m starting to get worried. And you accusing me of… what, exactly? Because I defended my roommate from a dog? Get a grip, Raj.”

He saw the moment Raj’s suspicion broke against the wall of Alex’s fabricated reality. The other boy’s shoulders slumped, the fight draining out of him. He just looked lost and scared.

“I just… he’s my friend too,” Raj mumbled, looking at the floor.

“I know,” Alex said, injecting a note of forced sympathy into his tone. He clapped a hand on Raj’s shoulder, the bandages stark white against Raj’s blazer. “We’ll find him. He probably just got drunk and passed out. Now come on. We have to go in there.”

He steered Raj toward the doors, his own heart hammering against his ribs. The encounter had been too close. Raj was a loose thread, and loose threads had a way of unraveling everything.

As they pushed through the doors into the crowded hall, a hush fell over the students. All eyes turned toward the front, where the headmaster stood flanked by two grim-faced men in suits who screamed “police” even in their civilian clothes.

And there, sitting three rows from the dais, was Nigel.

He looked utterly calm. Serene, even. His hands were clasped loosely in his lap, his posture perfect. His eyes scanned the room and, for a fraction of a second, locked with Alex’s. There was no warmth there, no secret smile. Just a cool, assessing look—a silent check that his

instrument was in tune and ready to play its part.

It was the look that steadied Alex more than any false reassurance ever could.

Alex took his own seat right before a hush fell over the hall.

The headmaster cleared his throat, the sound echoing over the heads of students.

“This morning,” he began, his voice grave, “the remains of Joshua Campbell were discovered near the railway tracks.”

A collective gasp rippled through the student body. Alex forced his face into a mask of stunned horror, letting his jaw go slack. He felt Raj stiffen beside him.

“The police are here to assist with the investigation,” the headmaster continued. “They will be speaking with all of you. I expect your full and honest cooperation.” His eyes swept over the student body, lingering for a moment too long on Alex. “This is a tragedy. A young life, cut short. We will get to the bottom of what happened.”

One of the detectives stepped forward. He had a kind face that didn’t match the sharp intelligence in his eyes.

“We’ll be setting up in the library,” he said, his voice calm yet sympathetic. “We’ll call you one by one. Just a few questions. We know this is difficult, but the sooner we can piece together Josh’s last movements, the better. We are sure this was an accident, so we aren’t accusing any of you.”

“Go to your individual classes and when an officer calls you, follow them and cooperate. Let’s all pray for Mr. Campbell’s family in this time of tragedy. ” The headmaster finished.

The assembly was dismissed with a low, anxious murmur spreading through the students. Alex didn’t move. He watched as Nigel got up and joined the flood of people.

Raj was pulled away by a group of sobbing friends. Alex stood alone in the dispersing crowd.

A hand he hadn’t noticed laced through his, and with a gentle tug he was led toward the exit. Before he could protest he looked up. Nigel was already studying him. Alex fell into step. Their intertwined hands hidden by their bodies.

This was it. The inquisition had begun.

The game was no longer between the two of them, yet it was still just as intimate. Now it was about performance. And the lead actor had just taken his hand, the script being rewritten in his head, leaving Alex in the wings, waiting for his cue, desperately hoping for a chance to glimpse the magnificence of his partner.

The walk to their first class—History, a cruel irony—was silent, but the air between them was thick with unspoken strategy. Nigel’s hand remained in his, a cool, steady anchor in the rising tide of Alex’s anxiety. It wasn’t a gesture of comfort; it was a tether, a physical reminder to stay present, to not get lost in the memory of blood and screaming metal.

They didn't look at each other. Their focus was on the hallways, on the other students, on absorbing the atmosphere of shock and gossip. Snippets of conversation floated around them like ghosts.

"—heard he fell from the train—"

"—always was a daredevil—"

"—do you think he was drunk?"

Each theory, each whispered assumption, was a brick in the wall of their defense. Alex let them wash over him, cataloging them for later. Nigel's grip tightened minutely, a silent command to listen, to learn the public narrative they would need to echo.

Nigel slipped into his usual seat at the back of the history classroom and Alex obediently took the empty chair next to him. Mr. Donaldson, looked pale and distracted, his lesson on the French Revolution abandoned for a somber discussion on grief and community. Alex stared blankly at the chalkboard, his bandaged hands resting on the desk. They were a beacon, a flaw in their perfect story.

As if reading his mind, Nigel leaned over, his voice a breath against Alex's ear. "Stop fidgeting. The bandages are a detail. A consistent one. We stick to the story."

Alex nodded, forcing his hands to still. The pain was a dull, grounding throb.

The classroom door opened, and a uniformed officer nodded to Mr. Donaldson. "Alex Forbes?" he called out.

Every head in the room turned to look at him. The air left Alex's

lungs. This was it. Sooner than he'd expected. He felt a surge of mild stage fright, but before it could take root, Nigel's foot pressed against his under the desk. A sharp, insistent point of contact.

Go.

Alex stood, his chair scraping loudly in the hushed room. He didn't look back at Nigel. He couldn't. He followed the officer out into the hall and toward the library, his heart a frantic drum against his ribs.

The library had been transformed. The usual quiet sanctuary was now a place of quiet interrogation. Desks had been pushed together to form makeshift stations. He was led to a corner where the kind-faced detective from the assembly sat, a notepad open before him. Another officer leaned against a bookshelf nearby, observing.

"Alex," the detective said, gesturing to the chair opposite him. "I'm Detective Miller. This is Officer Jacobs. We just want to ask you a few questions about your friend Josh. I know this is difficult."

Alex sat, folding his bandaged hands in his lap. "Okay," he said, his voice thankfully steady.

"When was the last time you saw Joshua?" Miller asked, his tone conversational, not accusatory.

"Yesterday afternoon. After history class," Alex recited, the words feeling rehearsed even though they were the truth. "We… we had a bit of a disagreement. He was messing with my roommate's things. I got angry. Told him to back off."

Miller nodded, jotting something down. “A disagreement about what?”

“He took a notebook. From Nigel. My roommate. I told him to give it back, and he did. Then I left. I was pretty pissed.” Alex let a sliver of genuine emotion—the remembered anger from the dorm room—bleed into his tone.

“And after that? Did you have plans to see him later?”

“Yeah,” Alex said, looking down at his hands. “We were supposed to meet on the train later. To… blow off steam. We do that sometimes. He said he had some new things he wanted to try.” He gestured vaguely, implying fireworks or petty vandalism.

“But you didn’t go?” Miller prompted.

Alex shook his head, injecting a note of sheepish guilt into his voice. It was a calculated risk. “No. I was still too mad. I ran into Nigel on my way out, and he asked if I wanted to get coffee and study. I figured Josh could wait. I… I never thought…” He let the sentence hang, trailing off into a convincingly shaky breath.

Miller’s eyes were compassionate. “It’s not your fault, son. These things happen. So, you and Nigel went to a café? Which one?”

“The Grind, down on Elm Street. We were there most of the afternoon; we headed back at around 9, we didn’t want to be late for curfew. Then we walked back to campus.” Alex kept his answers short, factual. The café was a real place, busy enough that their presence wouldn’t be memorable, anonymous enough that no one would be able to definitively say they weren’t there.

“And on the walk back?” Miller’s gaze flicked to Alex’s bandaged hands. “What happened there?”

Alex offered a wry, embarrassed smile. “A dog. Big, nasty thing. Came out of the bushes while we were taking the shortcut through the forest beaten path and went for Nigel. I got between them. It got me pretty good.” He held up his hands. “Nigel helped me clean up when we got back. It was too late for the nurse. He was very distressed that I got hurt for him, so he helped. ”

Officer Jacobs, the silent observer, shifted his weight. “You didn’t think to report a dangerous animal? Seek medical attention?”

“ I was going to this morning, but… ” He bit his lip, letting his eyes water a little. “ The assembly and the news and... ” He paused, wiping his eyes. “ It slipped my mind. ” Alex said with a shrug, meeting Jacobs’s gaze. “ As for the dog, It was just a stray. Scared more than anything.” He paused, then added, “Actually, Raj, our friend, he came by and saw the mess while Nigel was cleaning me up. He can tell you.”

It was a bold move, throwing Raj’s name out there. But it reinforced their story, made it intersect with another person’s reality. Miller made another note.

“And that was the last time anyone saw you? You and Nigel stayed in your room for the rest of the night?”

“Yes, sir,” Alex said, his heart hammering. This was the crucial part. The alibi. “ I was too tired to move after the whole ordeal, but Nigel studied for a bit and then we went to sleep. ”

Miller looked at him for a long moment, his kind eyes seeming to see right through him. Alex held his breath, keeping his expression one of weary, confused grief.

Finally, Miller closed his notepad. “Alright, Alex. Thank you. We may have more questions later, but that’s all for now. If you think of anything else, anything at all, please come find us.”

Alex nodded, standing on slightly unsteady legs. “I will. I just… I hope you find out what happened.”

He turned and walked out of the library, his back prickling under their gaze. He didn’t exhale until he was back in the hallway, leaning against the cool stone wall, his head spinning. It had gone well. Too well? Miller’s kindness felt like a trap, a velvet glove hiding an iron fist.

He needed to find Nigel.

As if summoned by the thought, he appeared around the corner, another officer at his side.

“Wait here, boy. I’ll call you in when they’re ready. ” The man said before walking into the library.

A beat.

Their eyes met. Nigel gave a single, almost imperceptible nod.

It was all Alex needed.

He crossed the distance between them, the adrenaline finally receding, leaving behind a raw, exhausted emptiness. He stopped in front of Nigel, close enough to smell the faint scent of soap on his skin.

“Well?” Nigel’s voice was low, devoid of its usual mocking lilt.

“They bought it. I think.” Alex ran a bandaged hand through his hair. “They asked about the hands. I told them about the dog.”

A ghost of a smile touched Nigel’s lips. “Good.”

“ You’re next,” Alex said, a new worry surfacing. “Are you ready?”

Nigel’s ice-blue eyes glinted with something dark and amused. “I am always ready, Alex.” He stepped closer, his movement fluid and precise. “Come on in, Mr. Colbie. ” The voice came from inside the library.

“My turn to perform. ” Nigel smiled slightly. Reaching up and adjusting Alex’s lapels. “Try not to look so worried, will you ? ”

He didn’t wait for a response. He turned and began walking toward the door, his posture straight, his composure absolute. Alex watched him go, a statue of calm certainty moving toward the heart of the storm.

And as Nigel disappeared behind the heavy oak, Alex realized with a

jolt that he wasn't afraid for them anymore. It all seemed suddenly insignificant.

The only thing that mattered was his spade, and he had just gone to deliver his lines. Alex knew, with a certainty that chilled him to his bones, that Nigel wouldn't just be convincing.

He would be flawless.

Chapter End Notes

Alex having panic attacks every 2 seconds

Nigel: i wiredly enjoy calming you down

SOOOOO WHAT DO WE THINK PLSPLSPLS COMMENT

Chapter 9: I bet [on losing dogs]

Chapter Summary

To get a reaction for every intent.
Will I come to heal? Will I defend?

Chapter Notes

IM ALIVE I SWEAR. I haven't one more ch almost ready after this one but senior year is kicking my ass already even though it hasn't started yet. Pray for me also also sout out to everybody who's commented i got like 8 notifications last night from sb binge reading this and it gave me motivation to post so ty.

About my future plans I think this fic will be around 70k - 100k when im done so do with that what you will

Title from Mitski

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Truth is a lie, deception a promise.
It's not who you are if your motives are honest.
To think, to caress,
To push and to press,
To get a reaction for every intent.
Will I come to heal? Will I defend?

Nigel was composed. Walking into the makeshift interrogation room, his mind was already spinning with every possibility. He was as ready as he could ever be.

"Mr. Colbie," the detective spoke as Nigel sat across from him as instructed. "We heard that you had an eventful night."

Here we go. The act was on.

"I suppose," Nigel said, looking down in embarrassment. The mask snapping into place with a definitive click.

"What happened with the dog? Could you tell me about it, please?" The prompt was almost gentle.

"I—" Nigel slumped back, looking away as if he could see the moment

flash before his eyes. "It came out of nowhere. It was big. I jumped back on instinct as it came at me, and the next thing I knew, the mutt and Alex were on the ground and there was blood." He made his breath hitch.

He knew he was good. He'd been out of practice, yet the detective's face was slowly melting into an expression of understanding and sympathy.

"The moment that thing ran away, I dragged Alex back to our room to help him clean up. It was too late for the nurse, and I had a ready first-aid kit." Nigel rubbed at his eyes, sniffling, on the verge of tears. "I was so scared. The idiot jumped in front of me so I wouldn't get hurt, and I felt—still feel—horrible about it. He could have gotten hurt way worse." The officer who had been leaning on a nearby shelf handed him a tissue, which Nigel gratefully took. He blew his nose before gathering himself and straightening up. "I'm sorry, sir. I'm just.... I guess you could say overwhelmed."

"It's alright, son," the detective nodded solemnly. "I understand how volatile emotions can be."

Yeah, right. Nigel held back a wince. If only he knew the true violence of scorned emotions. The way his J— Alex... the way Alex had exploded—the surreal beauty of it—nobody would ever know, and he would never let anyone see and live to tell the tale.

"What of this morning?" The questions continued.

"The assembly?" A slight nod. "That boy, Josh. I know he and Alex were close. I never knew him that well. I've been here," he gestured at the school at large, "for.... what has it been? Two? Three days? I was just getting to know everybody.... and I guess it all just feels surreal. It hasn't 'hit me' yet. The thing with Alex happened right in front of me, but this feels somehow detached from my emotions. I feel sad, I for sure, but I'm not grieving like most of the school." Nigel shrugged.

"I understand there was something about a notebook of yours which he took." The detective was out for the count. All he could see was the confused transfer student thrust into a series of increasingly uncomfortable and precarious situations.

"Honestly, I didn't even know about it until Alex returned it to me."

Nigel was weaving his lie so precisely into the tapestry of truth that the thread looked like it had always belonged. The police were so easy

to fool.

"Tell me about the coffee shop."

—

The heavy oak door of the library clicked shut behind Nigel, sealing him inside. Alex remained frozen in the corridor, the silence now a physical weight. He could hear the muffled, indistinct murmur of voices from within, but none of the words were clear. It was maddening.

He paced a short, tight line on the worn stone floor, his bandaged hands clenched into fists that sent fresh, sharp pains up his wrists. He welcomed it. The pain was a focus, a tether to stop his mind from spiraling into every possible thing that could go wrong. What if their stories didn't match perfectly? What if Nigel's icy composure read as psychopathic to the trained eye of the detective? What if Raj had already spoken to them and sown doubt?

Minutes stretched into an eternity. Each second was a lifetime of imagined disasters. He saw Nigel led away in handcuffs. He would never let that happen. He'd sooner turn himself in than let his spade take any of the blame.

Finally, the door handle turned.

Alex snapped to attention, his body tensing for a fight, for flight, for anything.

The door opened and Nigel emerged. He didn't look like a man who had just been interrogated about a murder. He looked as he always did: impeccably calm, his expression one of mild boredom. But there was a sheen to his eyes, as if he'd almost cried. Alex's heart almost stopped. Nigel closed the door softly behind him and turned to him.

For a long moment, he said nothing. He simply looked, his head tilted slightly, as if analyzing a fascinating new specimen.

“Well?” Alex's voice was a hoarse crack, the word ripped from him. He needed Nigel to be okay. He was desperate.

A slow, deliberate smile touched Nigel's lips. It wasn't warm; it was a blade being sheathed.

“They have nothing,” Nigel said, his voice low and even. “They have a

body on the tracks and a school full of gossip. They have no witnesses, no evidence, and two perfectly aligned testimonies that place us miles away, drinking overpriced coffee." He began to walk down the hall, and Alex fell into step beside him, his heart still hammering against his ribs. "The detective is thorough, but kind. He pities you. Thinks you're a loyal, grieving friend who got into a scrap protecting his roommate. He advised I keep a closer eye on you." The hint of a smirk returned. "As if you are my responsibility to manage."

They turned a corner, leaving the library behind. The normal sounds of the school—distant chatter, the slam of a locker—began to filter back in, the world returning to a semblance of its former shape.

"And Raj?" Alex asked, the name tasting like ash in his mouth.

"Mentioned," Nigel said with a dismissive flick of his wrist. "His account of seeing blood and a… tense atmosphere… only serves to corroborate our story about the animal attack. He is a footnote. An unreliable one at that, given his emotional state."

They reached a deserted stretch of corridor near the north stairwell. Nigel stopped walking and turned to face Alex fully. The analytical glint in his eyes intensified.

"Your performance was adequate," he stated, his tone clinical. "The guilt you projected over missing your meeting was a particularly effective touch. Humanizing."

Alex let out a breath he didn't realize he'd been holding. The tension in his shoulders eased minutely. "Adequate?" he echoed, a weak imitation of his usual arrogance returning. "I was brilliant."

Nigel's eyes narrowed, but the ghost of that dark amusement remained. "Do not let hubris be the thread that unravels this. The performance is not over. It continues in every glance, every conversation, for the foreseeable future. We are confused. We are innocent."

"I know," Alex said, his voice quieter now. The reality of the long game settled over him. The pretending wouldn't end today.

"Good." Nigel's gaze dropped to Alex's hands. Something possessive flashed in his eyes; Alex almost missed it. "The bandages will need changing soon. The stitches are holding, but the risk of infection is high given the environment they were acquired in."

The statement was delivered with the detached air of a physician, but the meaning beneath was clear. It was a shared truth, a secret now bonded in blood and lies. Mine—Yours, almost spoken out loud.

“Later,” Alex mumbled, looking away. The intensity of Nigel’s focus was too much to bear.

“Later,” Nigel agreed. He didn’t move. “We have English next. We should be seen attending class. It reinforces normalcy.”

He didn’t wait for agreement. He simply turned and continued down the hall, expecting Alex to follow.

And Alex did. He always would. He followed the calm, ruthless certainty of the boy who had just lied to the police with the ease of breathing, the boy who held his violence and his vulnerability in the same steady hands.

The storm wasn’t over. But for now, they were sailing through it. And Alex’s compass was walking a few steps ahead, a portrait of perfection.

—

The walk to English class was a study in surreal normalcy. Students milled about, their conversations a low, anxious hum about the "tragic accident." Whispers of Josh's name followed them like ghosts. Alex kept his head down, mimicking the shell-shocked expression of those around him. He didn't have to try very hard; the adrenaline crash of the interrogation left him feeling hollowed out and raw.

Nigel, by contrast, was a bastion of eerie composure. He nodded politely to a tearful boy from their year, his face arranged into a mask of somber acknowledgment. It was masterful. He was performing the role of a shocked and saddened student so perfectly it sent a fresh chill down Alex’s spine... one of something more potent than fear.... something that made him grit his teeth and force himself to think of anything else unless he wanted to pitch a tent in the middle of the hallway.

They slipped into their seats just as the bell rang. The English teacher, Mr. Grant, had red-rimmed eyes. The lesson plan was clearly abandoned.

"Class," he began, his voice wavering. "Given the... circumstances... today, I thought we might discuss themes of mortality and legacy in

the poetry we've been studying. Sometimes, art can provide a framework for understanding real-world tragedy."

Alex felt a hysterical laugh bubble in his throat. Understanding tragedy. If only he knew. His eyes flicked to Nigel, who was already pulling out his notebook, his pen held in his delicate hand. He looked attentive, ready to dissect sonnets as if he had been the one to compose them originally.

Mr. Grant's gaze swept the room and landed on Nigel. "Mr. Colbie. You have unique insights. John Donne's 'Death Be Not Proud.' In the face of a young life lost, how do you reconcile the poem's defiance with our very human grief?"

Every eye in the room turned to him.

Nigel placed his pen down deliberately. He was silent for a moment, as if gathering his thoughts, his ice-blue eyes looking not at the teacher, but at some middle distance, the picture of someone grappling with profound concepts.

"Donne isn't dismissing grief, sir," Nigel began, his voice quiet but clear, carrying effortlessly in the hushed room. "He's contextualizing it. The poem is an argument against the power of death, not its reality. It still happens. It still hurts." He paused, and Alex saw him subtly lower his shoulders, a minute gesture of feigned vulnerability. He was so beautiful in his element. "I think... the defiance is for the living. A reminder that the meaning of a life isn't erased by its ending. The memory, the impact—that's the victory Donne is proposing. However small it may feel right now."

It was brilliant. It was empathetic, intellectual, and the perfect response. It was exactly what a grieving, intelligent student should say. Mr. Grant looked visibly moved, nodding slowly. "Beautifully said, Nigel. Thank you for that."

A few students sniffled. Someone whispered, "Wow." Nigel gave a humble, almost imperceptible nod and looked down at his desk, the picture of modesty.

Alex had to bite his cheek hard and readjust in his seat to not show a reaction.

The rest of the class passed in a blur of somber discussion. Alex didn't speak. He couldn't. He was too busy watching the master at work and imagining all the ways he could make Nigel incoherent if given the

chance.

When the bell finally rang, signaling the end of the period, the spell broke. The room erupted into the usual noise of shuffling papers and scraping chairs. As they filed out into the hallway, Nigel fell into step beside Alex.

"See?" Nigel murmured, his voice once again low and devoid of its classroom empathy. "Normalcy. Participation. It reinforces the narrative."

"You're terrifying," Alex breathed out, the words escaping before he could stop them. They sounded like a prayer.

Nigel glanced at him, a flicker of genuine surprise in his eyes, quickly masked. "I am practical," he corrected, his tone flat. "Do not lose yourself in admiration." The crowd pushed them together, making their proximity staggering. Alex felt his breath hitch.

They were heading for the stairs when a voice called out behind them. "Forbes! Colbie! A word?"

It was Detective Miller. He stood with Officer Jacobs near the water fountain, his kind face looking more serious now. The last of the students were entertaining their classrooms.

The cold knot tightened in Alex's stomach again. 'They know. They figured it out.' He felt Nigel's hand brush against his wrist—a fleeting, silent command to 'be still'. He froze. The obedience was instantaneous.

"Of course, Detective," Nigel said, turning with a polite, inquiring expression.

"We just had a quick follow-up," Miller said, his eyes scanning their faces. "We've been reviewing the train's schedule and some... witness statements from other lines. It seems there was some sort of altercation on the 10:15 pm express last night. Loud noises. Shouting. Did either of you hear anything about that? Maybe from other students?"

Alex's mouth went dry. The 10:15 pm express. Their train. This was it. The house of cards was trembling.

He opened his mouth, but no sound came out.

"It was all anyone could talk about this morning, sir," Nigel answered smoothly, his brow furrowed in mild confusion. "The rumors are everywhere. Someone said they heard it was a fight between some townies and students from St. Julian's over a girl. Another said it was just a group of drunk kids being rowdy. It's terrible, thinking that might have been when Josh..." He let the sentence hang, injecting just the right amount of distressed realization into his voice.

Miller studied him for a long moment, then shifted his gaze to Alex. "And you, Alex? Hear anything specific?"

Alex forced himself to meet the detective's eyes, channeling the nervous energy into his performance. "Just... just the same stuff, sir. Lots of gossip. Nobody really knows anything." He gestured vaguely with his bandaged hand. "I was pretty out of it after the dog thing. Went straight to bed."

Miller's eyes dropped to the bandages, then back to Alex's face. He nodded slowly, but the kindness in his eyes was now tempered with a sharp, professional scrutiny. "I see. Well, if you do hear anything specific, anything concrete, you'll let us know immediately."

"We will," Nigel agreed with perfect solemnity. "We all just want to understand what happened."

"Indeed," Miller said. His eyes lingered on them for a beat too long before he nodded. "Alright. Carry on, boys. And Alex, get those hands looked at by a proper doctor."

"We will, sir. Thank you," Nigel said, and gently guided Alex away by the elbow.

They walked in silence until they turned the corner, out of sight into an empty hallway. Alex leaned heavily against the lockers, the presence beside him a comfort. "He was testing us."

"Of course he was," Nigel said, his voice cold. "It's his job. And we passed. Our story is consistent. The rumor about the fight on the train is already diversifying, which works in our favor. No one knows what really happened."

"He looked at my hands," Alex whispered.

"He's a detective. He looks at everything." Nigel groaned; it was such an exasperated, human sound that it took Alex aback. His analytical gaze swept over Alex’s face. "You need to breathe. You look guilty."

"I feel guilty," Alex admitted, the words a harsh whisper.

"Do you?" There was so much skepticism in the question that Alex didn't even notice Nigel stepping closer. "Because I think the chase is getting you excited." Nigel's hand went to his chest as he leaned in closer. "I think you're enjoying yourself." The hand trailed down, and Alex's breath hitched. "I'm not— I'm— am worried you're putting yourself—" The hand reached his lower abdomen, a finger tracing the top button of his pants.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.
Alex was getting legitimately lightheaded from how fast the blood was leaving his brain to reach other places. He could feel the flush on his face.

"—in dangerous situations." He shivered as that same finger just barely dipped into his waistband, hooking around the fabric before he was suddenly and harshly jerked away from the lockers and closer to Nigel.

"I can handle myself, and I don't take lightly to the idea of you doubting me. Behave and obey me, and we will have no issues with the police."

Nigel's expression didn't soften, but it shifted. The cold lines warmed a single degree into something like understanding. "Do not worry. I'm sure you can protect me if it came to that. I will be fine."

Before Alex could respond, the sharp, shrill sound of the fire alarm shattered the air. They pulled apart right as students and teachers spilled into the hallways, confusion replacing the somber mood. The blaring noise was a physical assault after the tense quiet.

"Probably a drill," someone shouted over the din. "Let's go!"

The crowd began to funnel toward the nearest exit. Alex was jostled, his injured hands knocked, sending jolts of pain up his arms. He lost sight of Nigel in the sudden chaos.

He called out, but his voice was swallowed by the alarm.

He was pushed along with the tide of bodies, out into the bright afternoon sun on the front lawn. Teachers were trying to herd students into groups, taking attendance. He scanned the crowd, his heart thudding painfully. Where was he?

Then he saw him.

Nigel stood slightly apart from the main group, under the shade of a large oak tree. He wasn't looking at the chaotic scene. He was looking down at his BlackBerry, his face illuminated by the small screen. And his expression—usually so meticulously controlled—was pale, his lips pressed into a thin, bloodless line.

Alex pushed his way through the crowd, ignoring the throbbing in his hands. "Nigel? What is it?"

Slowly, Nigel lifted his head. The look in his eyes was one Alex had never seen before: not cold analysis, not dark amusement, not one of his countless masks. It was pure, unadulterated shock. Alex was going to be sick. He had to fix whatever was happening.

Nigel turned the phone screen toward Alex.

It was a text message. From an unknown number.

The message contained only two words:

'I know.'

And attached below it was a picture of them. Right after the train. Holding hands Nigel leading Alex gently towards the school.

Fuck.

Chapter End Notes

Alex: panicking

Nigel *ooooo touchy touchy hehehhehe*
Alex *literally faints from a hard on*

HEHEHEHEH SO WHAT DO WE THINKKKKKKK PLSPLS COMMENT 🙈🙈🙈🙈

also im thinking of making Nigel trans like in my other fanfic but im still not sure, thoughts?

Chapter 10: You know better babe [then to talk to me like that]

Chapter Summary

It's not that bruised and buried creature
It's not the sermon of the preacher

Chapter Notes

A bit of a filler ch without that much plot just some *revelations*
still no posting schedule pls tell me what you think so far

Title from it will come back by hozier

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Panic once it's not a thought
It's not the mirrors you have fought
It's not that bruised and buried creature
It's not the sermon of the preacher
But it is heart and bloody soul
It digging out the endless hole

The world narrowed to the two words on the screen, glowing with malevolent certainty. The blaring fire alarm, the shouted orders from teachers, the confused chatter of hundreds of students—it all faded into a distant, meaningless roar. The only sound in Alex's universe was the frantic hammering of his own heart.

I know.
Fuck.

And the picture.
Double fuck.

Alex was on the verge of either developing a stress disorder or popping an aneurysm. This day just kept getting worse and worse. Lord above, he couldn't wait to pass out in his bed, preferably with Nigel on top of him again.

He stared, his mind refusing to process the implication. It was a bluff. It had to be. Josh was gone. They'd been careful. Their stories were airtight. Yet some bastard had caught them red-handed.... literally.

Alex felt too tired for this shit. His hand stung. His head hurt and he just wanted to drag Nigel closer, bury his face in that ivory skin and rest there for just a moment.

But the look on Nigel's face—the first true crack in that perfect, icy armor—sent a bolt of pure terror straight through him, wiping all thoughts of comfort from his mind.

"Who is it?" Alex's voice was a raw scrape, barely audible over the alarm.

Nigel's fingers tightened on the phone, his knuckles white. "An unknown number." The tone was clipped, stifled. Nigel was already calculating.

Alex was rattled, to say the least. He shifted closer, gripping Nigel by the elbow and pulling him in. "Did you see anyone while we were walking home?" Nigel's eyes snapped to his. "Did you?" Alex shook his head. "Fuck no, even if I did I don't remember like half of the night; I was way too out of it to notice." Nigel huffed, looking away, biting his lip in focus. "The area code is local, but that doesn't help us; it could be anyone."

"What do we do?" Alex felt unmoored, adrift. His own plan, his second chance, felt like a child's sandcastle against an incoming tide. He was out of his depth, and the only person who could navigate these waters was suddenly just as vulnerable as he was.

The fire alarm cut off abruptly, leaving a ringing silence in its wake that was somehow more oppressive. They shuffled apart. The sudden quiet was punctuated by the relieved sighs and nervous laughter of students.

"Forbes? Colbie?" Mr. Donaldson was making his way toward them, clipboard in hand. "You're both accounted for. Good. Probably just a drill, though the timing is… unfortunate. Head back inside when the all-clear is given."

Nigel didn't look at him. His entire being was focused on the phone. His voice was even, calm. "Thank you, sir. We will."

As the teacher moved away, Nigel's head snapped up. The vulnerability was gone, burned away by a cold fire. "We do nothing," he said, his voice low and urgent. "We don't react. This is a probe. A test. They want to see if we flinch."

“But they know—” Alex protested, his panic rising.

“They suspect,” Nigel corrected, his voice a razor’s edge. “There is a world of difference. If they knew, we would be in handcuffs, not receiving cryptic text messages. The photo isn't concrete evidence.” He shoved the phone into his pocket, his movement sharp with controlled energy. “This changes nothing about our performance. It only means the audience is more attentive than we thought.”

The all-clear bell rang, and students began shuffling back toward the building doors. The crowd enveloped them, a wave of mundane humanity sweeping them along.

Alex felt a hand on his arm. Nigel’s grip was firm, grounding. “Breathe,” Nigel commanded, his voice a whisper meant only for Alex’s ear. “Your pulse is racing. Your pupils are dilated. You look like a frightened animal. Stop it.”

The order, delivered with Nigel’s typical clinical detachment, was perversely calming. Lord above, he needed to stop panicking at everything. Nigel had been calming him down repeatedly all day; it was at the same time endearing and deeply embarrassing the way he folded at the quiet commands.

Alex took a shuddering breath, forcing his shoulders to relax, his expression to smooth. He nodded minutely.

“Good,” Nigel murmured, releasing his arm. “Now, we go to our next class. Act normal. If you feel yourself slipping again, tell me.”

They merged with the flow of students heading inside. But the world had shifted on its axis. The police were one thing. A known quantity. This… this was a ghost in the machine. An enemy they couldn’t see.

As they climbed the stairs, Alex’s mind raced. Who could it be? A witness on the train they’d missed? Someone Josh had confided in? The possibilities were a hydra; for each one he eliminated, two more appeared.

He glanced at Nigel. His face was a mask of calm indifference again, but Alex could see the tension in the line of his jaw, the calculated sharpness in his gaze as he scanned the crowd around them. He was hunting now. Looking for a tell, a flicker of recognition, anyone watching them too closely.

They reached the door of their chemistry lab. Nigel paused, his hand

on the handle. He turned to Alex, his ice-blue eyes locking onto his with an almost physical force.

“Remember,” he said, his voice barely a breath. “No matter what happens in there, no matter who looks at you or what they say… do not let the mask crack.”

He pushed the door open.

The lab was abuzz with the residual energy of the fire alarm. But as they entered, a hush fell. Every head turned. Not with suspicion, but with a morbid, sympathetic curiosity. They were the last ones to see Josh alive. They were part of the story.

Alex felt the weight of their stares like a physical pressure. He kept his eyes down, focusing on the familiar scuff marks on the hardwood floor. He could feel Nigel beside him, a steady presence radiating a warning to anyone who looked too long.

Their lab partner, a mousy boy named Choi, gave them a watery smile. “I’m so sorry about Josh,” he whispered.

Nigel nodded, a somber, grateful acknowledgment. “Thank you, Choi,” he said, his voice soft with a convincingly weary sadness. He pulled out his stool and sat, arranging his lab book with his usual precise movements. He was already back in character, the terrifying glimpse of shock completely hidden away.

Alex followed suit, his movements clumsy in comparison. He couldn’t think about anything besides that picture. The way he was walking a step behind Nigel, looking at him like.... like his absolution. Their hands intertwined, his covered to the wrists in blood —

Choi’s eyes widened. “Oh my god, your hands! What happened?”

Alex froze, focus returning to the present. He had to get used to the shock. He had to tell the story.

Before he could speak, Nigel did. He didn’t even look up from his book.

“A dog,” Nigel said, his tone laced with a hint of embarrassed regret, like he was partly to blame. “On our walk back from the cafe last night. It came out of nowhere. Alex was… very brave.” He finally glanced at Alex, and the look in his eyes was fond and bashful. Like he was moved by the supposed 'bravery'.

Alex managed a weak, self-deprecating smile. “Stupid, more like. It was just a stray. Scared me half to death.”

It was the right thing to say. Choi’s expression melted into sympathy. “Wow. That’s awful. After everything else…” He trailed off, shaking his head.

The chemistry teacher called the class to order, and the moment passed. The focus shifted to the periodic table and the day’s experiment.

But Alex couldn’t concentrate. He could feel the weight of the phone in Nigel’s pocket like a bomb. Every minute that ticked by was a minute the sender waited for a response. A reaction.

He watched Nigel. He was the picture of a diligent student, taking notes, measuring chemicals with a steady hand. But Alex saw the tiny tells. The way his pen would still for a fraction of a second longer than necessary. The way his eyes would occasionally lose focus, staring at the beaker in front of him but seeing something else entirely.

He was working. Processing. The cogs in his brilliant, terrifying mind were turning, analyzing the threat from every possible angle.

The bell rang, signaling the end of class. As they packed up their things, Nigel’s phone buzzed once, a short, muffled vibration.

Alex’s head snapped up. Nigel’s expression didn’t change, but his movements became infinitesimally quicker. He zipped his bag and slung it over his shoulder.

“Library,” he said to Alex, his tone leaving no room for argument. “Now.”

The tone was low, only for the two of them. This was getting serious.

The library was mostly empty. Nigel led them not to one of the central study tables, but to a secluded carrel in the farthest corner, hidden behind a stack of old manuscripts. He sat, placing his bag on the table with a soft thud. He didn’t look at Alex. He pulled out his phone.

Alex stood over him, his breath caught in his throat. “Well?”

Nigel stared at the screen. His face was pale again, but his eyes were burning with a cold, furious light.

He turned the phone around.

A new message glowed beneath the first.

I know what you did. And I know what he is.

A second image had been sent. It was a photograph, slightly blurred, taken from a distance.

It was a picture of them, from this morning. Nigel was astride Alex on the bed, his hand on Alex's body. Alex's face was tilted up, his expression one of helpless, wanton surrender. The angle made it clear the photo had been taken through the small window in their dorm room. Not down from the courtyard, but from one of the adjacent rooms through their own window.

The caption below it was a single, mocking word:

Cute.

Alex's blood ran cold. The air left his lungs in a silent, painful rush. He could feel the ghost of Nigel's weight on him, the cool press of his fingers against his skin—a memory that had been searing and private, now violated, exposed. The image was damning. It wasn't evidence of murder, but it was evidence of them.

He stared at the photo, at the raw vulnerability on his own face, and a hot wave of embarrassed arousal and fury washed over him. He whispered, his voice strangled. "They were watching us."

Nigel said nothing. His gaze was fixed on the screen, but Alex could see the calculations spinning behind his eyes, faster and more furious than ever before. The predator was not just alert now; it was cornered, and therefore infinitely more dangerous.

"Who has access to the dorm rooms?" Nigel's voice was a low, clinical hum, devoid of all emotion. He was already dissecting the problem.

"Almost everyone. Students. Staff. Cleaning crew." Alex's mind raced. "Raj's room is on the other side. He wouldn't have snuck into another room just to take a picture. Would he?"

"Unlikely. His emotional state was too volatile. This is... This is someone more vicious." Nigel finally looked up from the phone, his ice-blues meeting Alex's gold. The fury in them was a physical force. "They aren't going to the police. Not with this."

"Why?" Alex asked, desperation clawing at his throat. "What do they want?"

"Leverage," Nigel said, the word dropping between them like a stone. "Information. Power. This is an opening move. They're showing us their hand is strong. They're waiting for us to make a mistake, to panic, to try and contact them. They want to see what we do next."

"Fuck!" Alex slammed a hand on the table, hard enough to make the sting travel all the way to his shoulder, before moving a step back and beginning to pace anxiously around in the secluded space. "Why can't I have anything for fuck's sake." He groaned. His blood was boiling. This stupid second chance had gone so much worse than he had expected. Josh just had to get in the way and Alex obviously had to put him down for even touching his Nigel. And now some stupid piece of shit asshole was threatening the tentative balance he had just found. His knuckles ached with the need to hit something. So he swung, aiming for the wooden column between the shelves. Only for his hand to be caught before he could make contact.

"Don't be stupid. You'll only hurt yourself," Nigel hummed, mildly amused. The earlier madness was replaced with mockery at Alex's state. "Do not patronize me," Alex snarled. Using the leverage he had with Nigel's grip, he spun him, slamming Nigel against the wall he had been about to punch, hard enough that his head bounced. A low groan as he was pinned, then the words came.

"Feels good to vent one's anger, doesn't it?"

The photo had been a shock, and not a small one, but they were safe for now. He was sure of it. This was just a momentary distraction in his otherwise flawed plan...

And...
Oh god....

Nigel's knees had gone weak at Alex's frustration. Matter of fact, he had crossed his legs as he watched him pace just to relieve some of the pressure. It hadn't helped. He had been debating the merits of sticking a hand down his pants right then and there when Alex got the genius idea to punch the fucking wall like some lunatic and ruin all of Nigel's good work and possibly shatter a knuckle.

So he hadn't acted, he'd reacted, and he was paying for it.

Fuck, his knees going weak; he'd almost passed out from the arousal

the moment he felt the pain from the shove. The moment those eyes had looked at him with all that righteous fire.

This was bad; this was really bad. He was praying more than anything that a wet patch didn't show on his pants.

Shit, he'd bitten his lip. It was slowly bleeding as he muttered.

"Feels good to vent one's anger, doesn't it?"

...Jack...

He shivered at the thought.... maybe.... potentially it could be him.

Jack.
His.

As he had been claimed back on the train.

Maybe. He'll have to see. This was turning out more interesting than previously thought.

Chapter End Notes

Nigel and alex are playing bricked up hot potato. It's so funny

PLSPLSPLS COMMENT 🕳🕳🕳🕳 also u can come yell at me on insta @kenmascrossing

Chapter 11: That i might not have [but I did not lose]

Chapter Summary

And jokes are played and words are sung
To crack your chest and eat your lung

Chapter Notes

cough soooo..... im back DON'T KILL ME BUT I TOLD U UPDATES WILL NOT BE CONSISTENT. I haven't dropped this story thrust 💪💪💪💪💪 new ch is out and I have plans for the next. Life has been crazyyyyyy but im backkkkk

Update:08:10:2025
I NOW HAVE A TUMBLR FOR UPDATES GUYS GO CHECK IT OUT

https://www.tumblr.com/555-rent-a-bat?source=share

Title is from Stick season by Noah kahan
[Expect more titles from this song cz i think it's literally Alex after Nigel's death]

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Toe to toe and eye for eye
We limp we're blind and then we die
It's never fair the crooked choice
It's close enough to have a voice
And jokes are played and words are sung
To crack your chest and eat your lung

"What?" Alex bit out through clenched teeth, his face centimeters from Nigel's own.

"You heard me." The words were nothing more than a huff. "Be serious, this is a wake-up call. All day. All fucking day, Forbes, you've been panicking over nothing more than random nuisances."

Alex's eyes widened in outrage. "You can't be serious? What's your damage? What is this, some joke to you? Some fun mental exercise?"

"As a matter of fact, it is." Their voices raised with every syllable. Nigel could see the rabid intensity behind those golden eyes.

This wasn't helping his *case*. He tried to casually shift in a way to relieve the ache even a little. To his immense dismay, that movement somehow provoked Alex to get closer, unceremoniously shoving a thigh between Nigel's.

Shit, shit, shit.

The sharp sting of pleasure cut out his hearing for a second.

He needed to focus. Alex was yelling at him, and he was here using him as a fucking grinding post.

"—I am to you? Fuck you! Fuck you for not giving a shit about anything besides your stupid—"

Alex shifted closer still. That thigh pressing just right to make Nigel's response a little less thought out.

"So what? It isn't that seriou—"

Alex slammed him back against the shelf again, rattling the books in their spots.

"YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT I'VE LOST!"

The shout is followed by a silence cut through only by Alex's heaving breaths.

He could feel the heat of Alex's body. The pain from where his head had struck the wall was a dull, throbbing counterpoint to the frantic, hummingbird beat of his own heart.

He was trapped, pinned not just by Alex's physical strength, but by the terrifying vulnerability he had just unleashed.

For a long, suspended moment, Nigel could only stare. The golden fury in Alex's eyes was no longer just anger; it was a bottomless well of grief and desperation, and Nigel was falling into it.

Then, the switch flipped.
Nigel bared his teeth.

“Lost?” Nigel’s voice was a silken, dangerous whisper, a stark contrast to Alex’s roar.

“What exactly have you lost, Alex? Your comfortable life of mediocrity? Your place in the predictable, boring world you so clearly despised? Or is it something more… specific?”
His eyes, glacial and sharp, scanned Alex’s face, searching for the cracks he could widen. Alex, who was looking away, face downcast.
“Did you lose your nerve? Your stomach for the consequences? Or perhaps—”

Alex kept surprising him today. Because instead of feeding that fire, instead of biting back, he slumped forward, resting his forehead against Nigel's shoulder. "Enough...please."
His voice was raw. Way too raw. To the point where Nigel's jaw clicked shut before he could deliver any more cutting remarks.

"I'm sorry."

Nigel could feel each breath as the words were spoken.
His hands hovered mid-air, unsure of where he could put them. This was not going as planned. The feel of their bodies pressed together so close... so intimate. Alex’s hair just barely tickling the side of his neck as the softest shuddering gasps ran through him...wait..... was— was he crying.

"I— I just had to—"

On instinct almost, Nigel’s hand went to the back of Alex’s head. Maybe to comfort. Maybe to pull him closer. But that had obviously been the wrong move.
Alex flew back as if every place they had been touching suddenly burned. In the blink of an eye, he was a full arm's length away. Face averted, hands desperately wiping at his eyes.

"... forget it..." he rasped, turning his back and dropping heavily into one of the chairs at the table.

Nigel was left leaning on the shelves, reeling at the flip-flop of Alex's moods. The ghost of pressure on his body and the sudden lack of warmth made his knees weak enough that he strategically, definitely not without his own control, slumped on the floor.

There was a ping from the table.

Dazed, he reached out a hand, forcing his mouth to move. "Phone.

Give it here." He only had to wait a second between speaking and the device being wordlessly handed to him. Alex couldn't look at him; he even made sure their skin didn't graze. Nigel was going to be sick. This felt wrong. So, so wrong.

He made himself look down. Unlock the BlackBerry and open the chat.

The last message still stared at him; what made him freeze, though, were the three dots that suddenly popped up a second before a new message appeared right under the picture that had caused the initial buzz.

Another blasted picture. One of just moments ago.
Them - pressed together. It was taken from between the books, showing just enough. Alex's taller frame, even bowed as it was, hid most of Nigel except his face. And fuck... his face was was downright filthy.

The caption read.

'You get to have him... enjoy him while you can.
Don't bother looking for me; I left before sending this.'

"What is it?" Alex asked softly.

Nigel let his head drop back in defeat. It wouldn't do him any good to know.

"Nothing.... false alarm. No new messages."

Alex let out a sigh of relief. "So what do we do now?"

Nigel took a moment to center himself before getting up and dusting himself off.

"For now, we go have dinner, then we go sleep on it. Enough has happened today." He stepped closer, hesitating only a moment before running a hand through Alex's hair. Once, as if to fix it, but it was a purely self-indulgent move. "You've had more than you fair share of excitement."

The way he leaned into the touch—desperate eyes slamming shut as a shiver ran through him—made Nigel confident enough to rest the hand on the nape of his neck instead of taking it back.

"Come on. Up. Get your stuff; let's go."

———

The dining hall was a cacophony of subdued noise. The tragedy was the only topic of conversation, but it was discussed in hushed, excited tones. Death was a thrilling novelty for most of them. Alex felt off. The whole thing in the library had thrown any delusion of control he had.

He'd been putty in Nigel's hands. Had let him push his buttons like last time and had lashed out. Hurt him. Done the one thing he had killed to prevent. All because that damned picture threatened the precarity of his plans.

Every moment, every touch since had felt like Nigel's wordless forgiveness, and Alex couldn't bear it.

He followed Nigel to a table where a few guys from their floor were already sitting. Raj was among them, pushing food around his plate. He looked up as they approached, his eyes red-rimmed and flashing with displeasure at the two of them.

"Hey," one of the others, Mark, said somberly. "How you guys holding up?"

"Been better," Alex mumbled, sliding onto the bench. He focused on his plate, his appetite nonexistent. "I keep expecting him to walk in and complain about something... anything."

A few of the guys nodded in grim agreement.

Raj was watching them, his eyes narrowed. "Where did you guys go after class? I looked for you."

"Library," Nigel said without missing a beat. He took a sip of water. "Tried to study. Couldn't focus."

"Right," Raj said, his tone flat. He looked pointedly at Alex's bandaged hands. "How's the, uh, dog bite?"

Alex was getting annoyed. The words felt like an accusation. "Sore," he managed to get out without growling.

"It's a shame," Nigel interjected smoothly, drawing the attention back to himself. "The school should really do something about strays on

that path. It's a safety hazard." A few nodded. One of the boys piped up with his own story with the local not-so-wild life, becoming the focus of the group.

Alex kept his head down, picking at his food. He could feel eyes on him. Were they just his paranoia? Was it just the feeling of his second chance slipping through his fingers? His skin crawled. Every laugh from another table sounded like a mockery. Every glance felt like a threat.

He felt a pressure against his leg under the table. Nigel's knee was pressed firmly against his. A silent command. Steady.

Alex took a shuddering breath and forced himself to look up. He made eye contact with Mark and asked a question about something; his brain was fully on autopilot, the sounds around him muffled. His voice sounded strange to his own ears, but it was coherent. He was holding the line. Thankfully.

The meal was an eternity of excruciating normalcy. When it was finally over, they filed out with the others. The sun was beginning to set, casting long shadows across the quad.

As they walked back toward their dorm, away from the crowd, the fragile calm began to crack. The silence between them was thick with everything unspoken.

They were almost to their building when a figure stepped out from behind the large oak tree, blocking their path.

Alex paused, vague recognition scratching at his mind. Then it clicked.

Liam, a senior from the rugby team. He was big, a thick neck and a perpetual smirk as his defining qualities. He'd always been one of Josh's hangers-on.

"Forbes. Colbie," he said, his voice a low drawl. He looked from one to the other, his eyes lingering on Nigel with a strange, glinting curiosity. "Heard you two were the last to see Campbell alive."

This day just kept going to shit, and Alex was sick of it.

Nigel didn't even break stride. "We already spoke to the police, Liam," he said, his tone bored, dismissive. "If you have questions, take it up with them."

He tried to step around him, but Liam shifted, blocking his way again. He was standing too close. "Yeah, I heard about your little story. A dog." He snorted. "Convenient."

"What's your point?" Alex huffed, asked, his voice dropping into dangerous levels of annoyance. The change was subtle, as he pushed past Nigel to get in Liam's face.

The fucker's smirk widened as he leaned in, his breath stinking of cheap energy drink. "My point is, Josh told me he was going to finally put that freak in his place," he jerked his head toward Nigel and Alex bristled. "And then he ends up dead. And you two come back with a cute little story and matching injuries." His eyes dropped to Nigel's face, then to Alex's hands. "Looks like the freak had a bitch at his side."

Time seemed to slow. Alex felt his body go perfectly still. Not with fear, but with a lethal, poised readiness. Liam was a piece of shit, and Alex was more than ready to make him eat through a tube for the next few months.

And he would do it. Without hesitation.

Before he could move, before anyone could act, Liam's eyes flickered over Alex's shoulder, and his smirk vanished. He took a quick step back, his bravado evaporating.

"Whatever," he mumbled, suddenly looking anywhere but at them. "Forget it."

He turned and hurried away, almost jogging back toward the senior dorms.

Alex stared after him, bewildered by the sudden retreat, fists itching with tanked adrenaline. He turned to see what had spooked him.

Detective Miller was standing about twenty yards away, near a parked car, watching them. He made no move to approach. He just stood there, his hands in his pockets, his expression unreadable in the fading light.

He had seen the whole thing.

Nigel followed Alex's gaze. His own expression didn't change, but the tension drained from his shoulders, replaced by a different kind of alertness. He gave a slight, almost imperceptible nod to the detective,

a picture of polite acknowledgment, then turned and continued walking toward their dorm as if nothing had happened.

Alex scrambled to follow, suddenly way more awake.

"He saw that," Alex hissed as soon as they were inside the building and out of earshot.

"Of course he did," Nigel said, his voice low. He was already pulling out his phone again, his thumb flying across the screen. "He's doing his job. Watching. Waiting for a clue, a hint. Liam provided him with a very interesting one."

Nigel stopped at their door and finally looked at Alex. His eyes were alight with a new, fierce intensity. "He thinks Liam threatened you. He saw a bully confronting his dead friend's closest companion. He saw you stand your ground. It turns you — us — into the victims in this situation."

He unlocked the door and pushed it open. The room was dark and quiet. He didn't turn on the light.

"He also saw," Nigel continued, his voice a whisper in the dark, "we weren't the instigators. In my opinion, he's already written us out of the suspect list. He's turning towards those who may harm people..." He finally looked at another buzz. "People who might send threatening messages."

Yet another message had arrived.

"Tell your guard dog to heel. Or the picture goes public." Nigel read, looking up at Alex with the smallest smile.

They were being managed. The sender had seen the confrontation with Liam. They knew about it instantly. They were close. Very close. But that closeness would cost them.

"They are getting sloppy."

Nigel’s face in the dim light from the phone screen was a mask of cold, joyful fury. The sender had made a critical error.

And Alex knew his spade wouldn't let that slide.

Chapter End Notes

Alex *desperately heaving*: I CAN'T LOSE YOU AGAIN

Nigel *out of his mind horny* :can we pls continued this conversation after fucking cz im starting to smell sounds.

—

SO WHAT DO WE THINKKKK???? Comments are literally the only thing that forces me to write so pls say smth 🫦🫦🫦🫦

Chapter 12: I'm on my back [you're on my mind]

Chapter Summary

> On my back is where I sit
> Just the match I need is lit

Chapter Notes

> IM BACK
> [Long note]
>
> Not fully back cz i have exams in two weeks and im swamped BUT
>
> WE FINALLY HAVE A PLOT AND A TIMELINE SOTHIS IS NO LONGER AIMLESSLY GOING NOWHERE
>
> if you want semi consistent updates on how writing is going and theories or just to see some insanity go to my Tumblr @555-rent-a-bat
> I split this into 2 cz i was getting stuck in my head while writing so a 2k ch it it.
>
> ALSO GUYS pls be mindful that im posting as i write this is the best I can do but I promise I will not drop this fic ong.
>
> Anyway title is from morning blue by the Giant Rooks

See the end of the chapter for more notes

On my back is where I sit
Just the match I need is lit
Sleep and watch me breathe
To take my soul and let it seeth
My emotions are the soil
There's no need your plan to foil

The rest of the week and the beginning of the next one turned out insufferably uneventful. The constant expectation of a repeat of the excitement from that first day after the train left Alex in a perpetual state of exhaustion. There was no sign of the sender since that last message, but still, day in and day out, they kept up the charade. Each

day, the same lie, the same fake smiles, and the same excuses.

He wasn't sleeping well. Not from guilt—no, but from the careful distance that Nigel had established after that first day. There had been no more casual fingers on his back, his sleeve, or in his hair. He was feeling it like withdrawal. He knew it had to be done. Their secret admirer was watching. Even in their own room, it wasn't safe. It was grating.

He felt the lack keenly, having gotten only that small taste early on. That wasn't to say Nigel was cold… quite the opposite, actually. Nigel began annotating Alex's books. Alex had no idea where he found the time to not only steal his literature but annotate it and put it back exactly where he'd found it.

The first time he'd realized there was writing on the pages of his worn copy of Demons by Dostoevsky, he'd frantically rubbed his eyes, convinced he was hallucinating. But it wasn't a fluke. Pages and pages of neat, small handwriting in the margins of his favorite books began appearing, and his passion for reading was suddenly reignited. It felt fitting – Nigel writing himself into the small cracks of Alex's life all over again.

That wasn't all, though. Nigel had also grown comfortable, and Alex had begun to notice details about him. Like the fact that he was always cold, supported by the frequent appearance of Alex's thickest wool socks, which had been collecting dust in the back of his closet for the longest time, that could now be spotted on Nigel's feet at all times.

Even with all of that, Alex still felt the lack of physical contact like a knife in his side. Those hands had become his most torturous temptation. Alex had caught himself multiple times getting lost mid-class to the rhythm of Nigel's fingers on the desk. He knew that Nigel played. Last time…. 'He' had told him. But even without context, it was obvious: the posture, the nails perpetually clipped short like clockwork every two days, the way he was obviously hearing music with each strike of his fingers on the hardwood table. Alex swore to himself he'd make sure he got to hear Nigel play in this lifetime.

Disregarding any and all needs, he pushed on—beyond the overwhelming expectations that Nigel had wordlessly hung across his shoulders, and beyond the desperation, the desire to get this over with and just run away instead of playing games.

By the end of the week, they were interviewed again, one by one. The investigation was rendered inconclusive, and everybody was cleared. The announcement of that at yet another midday assembly, along with the confirmation of the funeral date, meant students had been given the day off to mourn.

The night before, Alex had hunkered down to rest while Nigel disappeared off to the library, leaving Alex to his own devices, who, for his part, had neatly laid out a set of gray night clothes and locked himself in the bathroom, gladly taking a scalding hot shower to combat the constant, lingering chill that clung to the vast halls of the dormitories.

The bandages had come off the previous day and he was eager to shower without worrying about getting them wet. They weren't healed, not remotely, but they had began to close and Nigel had carefully taken out the stitches, deeming the wounds closed "enough".

Letting the water wash away the anxiety, he took his sweet time scrubbing his body and hair. He'd shaved, brushed his teeth, slung a towel around his hips and one on his head, and was exiting the bathroom when two things became apparent.

One: his clothes were missing. And two: the obvious culprit was dead asleep on the bed across the room. Only Nigel's raven hair was slightly peeking out from the downright absurd amount of blankets piled on top of him. Alex double-checked the spot on his bed, but it sat empty. He'd resigned himself to getting answers about his missing property tomorrow. As much as he would have enjoyed digging around Nigel's mind, they both had a big day tomorrow, and he'd rather chew his own arm off than wake his spade.

So he got dressed in something else and slid under his covers, preparing for yet another night of restless sleep, even with the knowledge he didn't have to get up early tomorrow.

Which is why it was incredibly confusing when he woke up from the best rest he'd gotten in over a week.

Alex was experiencing an awful case of déjà vu.

The warmth against him felt familiar.

And as consciousness slowly bled back into his mind, he began to realize the position he was in. His head lay on a stomach covered by an incredibly familiar shirt—the one he'd set out for himself yesterday

—and one that obviously hadn't discouraged his hands from sliding underneath to rest on soft, naked skin…. Nigel's skin. Then there were the fingers in his hair… those wicked fingers. And the biggest offender in this situation was the thighs wrapped around his torso clad in his pants.

He was somehow far beyond fucked...

Unable to move but also unable to restrain the soft pattern that his thumbs had started tracing.

A soft, sleepy chuckle came from above and the fingers in his hair shifted and ran down to gently scratch at his neck.

He bit back a moan, instead choking out a half-incoherent rasp. "Huh!?"

Another chuckle and this time a tug on his hair. "How very eloquent, Forbes." The voice came again. Alex attempted to shift his head up but his efforts were quickly squashed as his head was, albeit lightly, forced back down into his previous position. "Stay down, for God's sake." Nigel groaned in exasperation, "I finally got warm, don't ruin it." Alex instinctively relaxed, terrified that any too-sudden movement would make Nigel throw him off. Instead, the body under him nestled closer with a content sigh.

"Stop thinking so much." The hands were back in his hair, shifting through soft orange strands, scratching at his scalp and caressing his ears. Ears which were continuously getting redder and redder with every choked-back sigh and half-formed moan that was threatening to escape if Nigel pulled too hard.

"I— can't really-ah-" His attempt at speech was ineffective.

Alex was going to curl up and die of shame... he hadn't even known he could make that sound. The fingers tugged at the same spot again and he once again let out that breathy exhale.

Nigel was shaking with suppressed laughter and Alex decided that he was in love with the devil.

"It's ok, you don't have to talk. Just relax. I need you functioning at full capacity today. That means no stress on your part, so just — " a particularly toe-curling sensation came from his neck as Nigel ran his manicured nails oh so lightly down to the collar of his shirt then underneath. " — let me do this." Now that... that elicited a deep moan

that he managed to just barely muffle by turning his head and burying his face fully in Nigel’s stomach.

Alex would let Nigel do about anything right now... and instead of saying that like a lovesick fool, he did the equally damning thing and gripped Nigel's waist, surrendering fully to sensation.

———

Nigel had never felt more satisfied with himself than in this moment right now.

The week had been downright hellish. Limiting physical contact had been a practical choice as to not incriminate them both and to not give that fucker any more ammunition. But Nigel was a selfish creature by nature and the curiosity surrounding his would-be Jack was making his tongue itch to taste. So he'd done what came naturally. He'd snooped. One of the days after classes he'd come back to the room early and had meticulously searched through every single one of Alex's belongings, and his first related addiction was there. Sitting inside of Alex's desk. The books. At least he found how to occupy his time.

The weather had also been getting progressively colder and he'd decided that he'd much rather freeze than call home for his 'parents' to send his heavy winter clothes. He'd prefer to put that off as long as humanly possible. So he had resigned to the frigid truth until, of course, a thought had come to mind.

Alex.

So the habit was born. An undershirt here, socks there, a scarf or long-forgotten gloves. He was sure that Alex hadn't noticed anything besides the socks. And what a blessing his little thievery was. No more fingers seizing up on him and no more random joint pain. The small joys.

He was going to burn in hell for this, maybe... but he was hooked on Alex's scent. That clean musk, the soft citrus, it all made his mouth water.

And that whole collection of buildup had finally crescendoed the previous night.

When Nigel had come back too early from the library, the shower still on and Alex's clothes neatly laid out on the bed, he'd made yet

another impulsive decision. He'd stripped... fully... and put the sleep clothes on. The soft fabric was heavenly warm and it smelled so good it made him lightheaded. His marveling was cut short by the shower cutting off.

He quickly slid into bed, plan forming as he listened to Alex exit, walk out, and presumably decide that waking Nigel about his missing property was pointless, instead resigned to sleep.

He'd been patient.

Waiting..... Waiting.....

Until Alex's breath evened out and his constant fidgeting stopped.

Then Nigel acted.

A week of observation gave him the confidence to not so quietly slip out of bed, carrying the enormous pile of blankets with him and plopping down next to Alex without him even stirring once.

He'd fallen asleep almost instantly, Alex working as the perfect space heater.

Now he was the most satisfied he could ever remember being. Alex was the most wonderful weighted blanket, his hair was incredibly soft and his warm hands kept making those utterly distracting circles.

Sure... he did want Alex to be centered, focused, but Nigel was selfish. This was for him. To relax himself as well. And it was working, working beautifully. Alex kept making these little noises and his ears matched his hair with how red they were getting, but Nigel could feel his muscles loosen.

"There you are," he hummed, never pausing in his work. He got a mumbled response a few minutes later.

"Why... why the clothes?" It came out mostly muffled by those same clothes.

Nigel was in the deepest shit he'd ever been in his life, because why... in the name of God... did that make him flustered. He wasn't ashamed. He didn't regret his actions.

Yet...

Yet that simple question had thrown a wrench in his peaceful mind.

And worst of all, he had an answer.

He was about to say it too... like some fool. But, thank all that is holy, his alarm decided to ring at that moment, which gave him the excuse to not reply but instead to softly and reluctantly urge Alex to move and free him.

Alex... who, after a few grumbled protests, did actually move, sitting back and allowing Nigel to slip off the bed and turn off the persistent beeping.

"We need to get ready. Go take a cold shower."

Nigel didn't turn and didn't really hesitate before beginning to change into the proper funeral attire.

The moment the shirt was off he could hear some frantic shuffling and a few cursed expletives as Alex bumped into furniture before slamming the bathroom door shut behind himself.

This was shaping up to be quite the day, Nigel thought as he smiled to himself.

Chapter End Notes

> Alex: *incoherent sounds from being overwhelmed*
> Nigel: *displaying physical intimacy* yeah this will never happen again
>
> *It will it def will happen again*
>
> ____
> SO WHAT DO WE THINK
>
> Comments are my food and air pls pls leave some and come yell at me on Tumblr for yet another cockblock hehhehehehehehehe

Chapter 13: AUTHOR'S NOTE IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

Chapter Summary

NEW UPDATES

This is real important for those who are following the fic and are waiting patiently for updates.

I'm currently rewriting the chapters that are already out i will update them all at once so I need some time but on the bright side I have 20k more words written and I'm not slowing down which means that I'll start consistent updates which I HOPE YALL ARE HAPPY FOR THAT CZ IVE GOT SOME REAL REAL GOOD SHIT COMING.

Also, the last chapter I posted there will be one more chapter before that one that is kind of filler but it's necessary bc I want more character development and I want to give more time for these mfs to get to know each other.

Im incredibly thankful for 100 kudos and this has pushed me to write way more.

This whole announcement will get turned into an author's note on the next ch when I post it.

I'll try to have everything updated by the end of the week and after the 12th ill try to do at least 2 chapters a week until the first arc is done.

ALSO ALSO. Im making up back stories for our two main fuckers and they are both traumatized. There will be a lot of discussions around child abuse. That's also the reason im re doing the already posted chapters so they fit better with the rest of the story.

ALSO YALL ARE GETTING *drum roll pls* FOURMING WOOOO

Ok! If you want more info I post updates on Tumblr @555-rent-a-bat come yell at me ab those mfs

That's it for now if you have any more questions plsplspls ask im

always happy to answer.

New ch1 is posting today

SEE YOU SOON LOVE YA ❤

-Lambi♡

End Notes

Sooo what do we think (pls comment i really wanna know what you thought)

Works inspired by this one

how we ended (it was just the beginning for me) by icantdecide_4life

The Ghost He Loved by EllaLunar123

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!